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Clinton 'indicts' Saddam

PRESIDENT Bill Clinton has intensified US pressure on Iraq to open its suspected weapons sites, warning Saddam Hussein not to "defy the will of the world" and directing Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to sweep through Europe and the Gulf seeking support for military action.

In his State of the Union address on Tuesday night, Clinton indicted Saddam personally for trying to stop United Nations weapons inspectors from completing their mission to rid Iraq of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons capability.

"You cannot defy the will of the world. You have used weapons of mass destruction before. We are determined to deny you the capacity to use them again," Clinton said, pointedly declaring that he was speaking for everyone in the chamber. His address to the nation was attended by members of Congress and his cabinet.

Before the speech, Clinton talked to British Prime Minister Tony Blair on the telephone, the two closely allied leaders agreeing that the Iraqi situation was serious.

In a subtle reference to sex allegations against Clinton, Senate majority leader Trent Lott said the Congress would back the president against Iraq "despite any current controversy".

Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich also told reporters Saddam must understand Americans support "whatever steps are necessary to protect our lives in the future," adding, "This is not about the Clinton administration; this is about all Americans."

Along with Albright's planned trip, Defence Secretary William Cohen is weighing a parallel trip to the Gulf region, seeking backing for a military response in a calculated campaign to put maximum pressure on Iraq. Also, Bill Richardson, the ambassador to the United Nations, plans a week-long trip to Europe, Africa and Latin America to affirm the US position.

"If diplomacy fails here, we will have to look at different actions," said Pentagon spokesman Kenneth Bacon, adding that Cohen's talks would be "to consult with our friends and allies in the Gulf about possible military action."

Albright was due to depart today to confer with the French, British and Russian foreign ministers and then go to the Gulf for talks with leaders of Arab countries that are within Iraq's range.

In a double-barrelled six-day mission, she also plans to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and in Palestinian self-rule territory with Yasser Arafat on sputtering peacemaking.

The Pentagon's spokesman said that in the event of a military strike against Iraq, US forces would target not only suspected chemical weapons sites but also numerous military units that help keep Saddam in power.



photo: Randa Shaath

SHORN FOR THE FEAST: A little last minute grooming invariably accompanies the rush of preparations for the festivities that mark the end of Ramadan

photo: Reuters

State of affairs

After a confident State of the Union address, President Clinton appears to have regained some prestige, tarnished by sex and cover-up accusations

In an extraordinary clash, Hillary Rodham Clinton accused the Whitewater prosecutor Tuesday of allying himself with "right-wing opponents" out to destroy her husband.

The prosecutor dismissed her comments as "nonsense" and summoned President Bill Clinton's personal secretary before a grand jury.

"Our current investigation began when we received credible evidence of serious federal crimes," Whitewater Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr said in a tersely-worded statement defending the expansion of his investigation into allegations of a presidential affair and cover-up.

Among the issues Starr is investigating is whether Clinton encouraged former White House intern Monica Lewinsky to lie on a sworn affidavit she gave in connection with the Paula Jones sexual harassment lawsuit and whether job offers that Clinton's friend Vernon Jordan arranged were in any way connected.

The White House waited anxiously to see whether Ms Lewinsky, the young former intern at the centre of the storm, would be granted immunity from prosecution. Her attorney, William Ginsburg, said there were no talks between himself and prosecutors on Tuesday. He also said he did not think that the "small and inconsequential" gifts the FBI agents seized from Ms Lewinsky's home would shed much light on the relationship.

In a television appearance Mrs Clinton went on the offensive to defend her husband, launching her most direct and personal attack to date on Starr's investigation. He is "a politically motivated prosecutor who is allied with the right-wing opponents of my husband," she said on NBC's *Today* show.

Prosecutors have been "looking at every telephone call we've made, every cheque we've ever written, scratching for dirt, intimidating witnesses, doing everything possible to try to make some kind of accusation against my husband," she said.

Mrs Clinton predicted the allegations would be proven false and said they were the work of a "vast right-wing conspiracy that has been... against my husband since the day he announced for president."

"This is an effort to undo the results of two elections," and when all the facts are known "some folks are going to have a lot to answer for," Mrs Clinton said.

The scandal broke a week before Clinton's yearly policy address to the nation and it seemed then the timing could hardly have been worse. But facing a joint session of Congress Tuesday night, Clinton reminded Americans of progress made under his leadership and seemed to contain some of the damage caused by sex and cover-up allegations.

"This was a winning evening for President Clinton," said Henry Graff, a respected presidential historian at New York's Columbia University who described Clinton's State of the Union address as "beautifully delivered."

Prior to the speech, Washington was abuzz with whispers that Clinton might receive only half-hearted applause and tepid signs of support, even from members of his own party. But his 70-minute address was repeatedly interrupted by enthusiastic applause from both parties, particularly in reference to balancing the budget. The scandal seemed to have been forgotten, but only briefly.

Clinton had denied the accusations on Monday. "I want you to listen to me," he said. "I'm going to say this again: I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky. I never told anybody to lie, not a single time. Never. These allegations are false."

The 62-word denial took 20 seconds, during which Clinton jabbed his finger in the air seven times, glaring straight into the news cameras.

"I think that President Clinton's denial is enough for now," Allan J. Lichtman, a political analyst and author of the *Keys to the White House* told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "At this point... he should not get into any detailed account of what happened until allegations against him are clarified. I think the American people for now will accept his denial. I don't think his standing will plummet, but this is only the beginning, not the end, of the situation."

***Thomas Gorguissian** in Washington, wire dispatches*

INSIDE

The truth after Washington

Are the Oslo agreements worth the paper they are written on? Increasingly not, writes **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem

Last week's separate meetings in Washington between President Bill Clinton, Binyamin Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat had been prefaced as the "moment of truth" for the Oslo process. And, once the meetings were over, the truth was summed up by Palestinian political analyst, Khalil Shakaki. "Netanyahu is not going away, the Clinton administration will not pressure him and any thoughts of confrontation with Israel are likely to be rejected by the Palestinian Authority as too costly."

Not that anyone would get this message from the spin put on Washington by Palestinian Authority (PA) spokespersons. Citing Clinton's comments that Palestinians have the right "to live as free people" and the unusual warmth with which Arafat was feted at the White House, PA Cabinet Secretary Ahmed Abdel-Rahman, told Voice of Palestine radio that the Washington meetings "testified to a change for the better in the Palestinians' status".

Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, though, are unlikely to see Washington as anything other than what it was — a victory for Netanyahu's agenda.

Despite seven hours of "attritional" talks, Clinton was unable to move Netanyahu from his insistence that neither the scale nor the timetable for Israel's second West Bank redeployment would be forthcoming unless the PA showed "strict compliance" with its responsibilities as set down in the 1997 Hebron agreement — namely, to "complete the process of revising the Palestinian National Charter" and "fight terror and prevent violence" in the Palestinian self-rule areas. The only concession gleaned was Netanyahu's apparent willingness to go along with a US-led initiative that has PA compliance accompany the redeployment rather than be its precondition.

Following the meetings, US State Department spokesman James Rubin said that this inch by inch approach was "one that both parties have accepted in principle. Now the problem is to get closure on the gaps that still exist on how much territory would be transferred, on what parallel [Palestinian] security steps must be taken, on which territory must be transferred." US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is expected to travel to the region in the next two weeks in a renewed effort to close the gaps.

Arafat has already decided to close his. In Washington, he presented Clinton with a letter detailing 27 clauses of the National Charter that had been annulled in line with Palestinian commitments under the Oslo Accords and reportedly agreed to convene a session of the PLO executive to make the annulment "official". He also agreed to renegotiate a CIA drafted security agreement between the two sides to accommodate Palestinian and Israeli "changes". So keen was Arafat to convince the Americans of his concern for Israel's security that, on 23 January, PA officials reportedly hauled the CIA's representative in Israel to Jericho to prove that Palestinians Israel alleges the PA has released are actually still in jail.

Neither the letter nor the gesture cut much ice with Netanyahu. Throughout his stay in Washington he implied that the maximum West Bank territory his cabinet would yield in any further redeployments is 9.5 per cent. He also made it clear that should the US and the PA insist on a third redeployment (as guaranteed in the Hebron agreement) he would reduce the territorial scope of the second. As for the Palestinian Charter, Netanyahu wants Arafat to again convene the Palestinian National Council (PNC) to rescind the offending clauses.

Arafat dismissed the territorial offer as "peanuts" and reiterated that the PNC had already changed the Charter in April 1996, a decision accepted at the time by the then Prime Minister Shimon Peres and by President Clinton. Such are the rocks on the road ahead.

But it is a road to one side only. Whatever the fate of the Americans' initiative, Netanyahu has already won from them an acceptance that the next redeployment will be small, will be tied to PA compliance with Israel's security concerns and will leave the bulk of the West Bank under Israel's control ahead of Oslo's final status negotiations. Given that the PA had expected to get 60 per cent of the West Bank out of the first and second redeployments, this is no mean achievement on Netanyahu's part. Nor do the Palestinians seem to have gained any real US support for their demand that a return to negotiations be accompanied by a settlement freeze in the Occupied Territories.

For most Palestinian observers, Arafat's retreat is the inevitable outcome of a strategy that gambled all on "American pressure" on Israel. In Washington, the pressure was not forthcoming, with the result that Arafat was forced to grasp the miserly American "initiative" as the only straw left to him. If so, Arafat's sole aim now will probably be to get as much turf as he can out of the next redeployment, guided by the Americans' lead and bolstered by Arab and European diplomacy — the only arenas in which Palestinian misgivings over Netanyahu's policies can translate into real prospects of political sanctions.

Beyond that, Palestinians will be pondering the real "truth" of the Washington meetings. And this, says Shakaki, is the belated recognition that the peace process is stuck not only because of Israeli intransigence and US bias, both of which could have been assumed. It is stuck because of the utter inadequacy of the Oslo agreements that underlie it.

"I think the last 18 months of the Netanyahu government have been an excellent lesson for the Palestinian negotiators," says Shakaki. "All of the major issues of conflict between us and the Israelis stem in part from a failure to insist on specific Israeli commitments in the agreements. We don't know the size of the redeployments. Well, why don't we know? It is unclear whether a settlement freeze is in Oslo's text or in its spirit. Yet how could an issue of such importance have no explicit reference in the agreements? For all Netanyahu's stonewalling, Arafat cannot point to a single article in the agreements that proves conclusively that Netanyahu is not adhering to them. This is the real problem."

(see p. 2)

Anticipating the 'moment of truth'

After Washington's failure to break the impasse in the peace process, Cairo launched intensive inter-Arab talks. **Nevine Khalil** reviews the week's diplomatic activity while **Dina Ezzat** explores Arab options

Cairo began intensive consulations with Arab leaders this week, and spoke more strongly about the need for an Arab summit to rally Arab ranks. During talks between President Hosni Mubarak and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat on Tuesday, the two leaders discussed future steps to salvage the peace process. "The talks covered [possible] Arab action to confront the [deterioration] of the peace process," Foreign Minister Amr Moussa told reporters. "The idea of an Arab summit is on the table, but no steps have been taken yet to organise such a summit."

Two days earlier, Mubarak held extensive talks with Jordan's King Hussein, which Moussa described as "the beginning of a series of consultations among Arab leaders following the Washington talks."

Since US mediation failed to achieve progress, Arafat has campaigned for an Arab summit to deal with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's intransigence. The Palestinian president came to Cairo after talks with British Prime Minister Tony Blair in London, and a tour of North African countries — which took him to Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania to lobby support for an Arab summit.

In London, Arafat said that the idea of an Arab summit at this point in time "fell on very receptive ears" during his talks with Blair, whose country heads the EU troika. French President Jacques Chirac said this week that his country's "deep disappointment and deep concern" over the peace process was shared by the EU.

At the 1996 summit in Cairo, Arab leaders agreed to review the concessions that had been made to Israel if Netanyahu did not honour his commitments under the signed agreements. Nearly 18 months after Netanyahu came to power, the Arab world continues to criticise his policies, but is divided over what the Arabs' next step should be.

The miniature summit is expected to include Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Lebanon as well as the Palestinians. But Lebanon said this week that a comprehensive agenda must be agreed upon before a summit is held. "[Arafat's] proposal is premature," said Faris Bouez, Lebanon's foreign minister. "Like in every extraordinary summit, everything must be known in advance."

The Arab League's Assistant Secretary-General Mohamed Zakariya Ismail said on Monday that "several Arab countries are considering a summit," adding that the League favoured the idea. "After the failure of the Washington meetings, the Arabs must think of new steps to put the peace process back on track," he asserted.

A major part of the two-hour Mubarak-Arafat discussions focused on the Palestinian leader's meetings with US President Bill Clinton and other American officials in Washington last Thursday. In Cairo, the Palestinians spoke in detail of the proposals which Netanyahu had conveyed to the Americans. Arafat had described the Israeli proposals as "peanuts" and Moussa said "it was clear that what was submitted was not a serious offer capable of salvaging the peace process."

Added Moussa: "The moment of truth is near because handshakes and smiles are not an alternative to achieving balanced and just results."

He asserted that what was required was tangible progress, "not just sympathy because the situation is very dangerous and meetings in themselves do not achieve progress". Egypt's top diplomat expressed hope for a quick revival of the peace process, warning that it was losing credibility fast.

Before leaving Cairo, Arafat said that the peace process is threatened because of Netanyahu's "persistence in frustrating every mediation effort undertaken by any party" and his refusal "to carefully and honestly implement what was agreed upon". Moussa said that the Israeli proposals for redeployment in the West Bank are "bleak and offer no possibility of progress".

On the other hand, the US State Department holds that the Palestinians and Israelis had accepted a new US approach, though they remain at odds with regard to basic issues. "There are still major gaps on very important issues," noted spokesman James Rubin on Monday, "but we do believe that the concept the President laid down is one that both parties have accepted."

US special envoy Dennis Ross will arrive in the region soon to continue mediation efforts between the Palestinians and Israelis. "We await serious offers, not just any movement," Moussa said. "This can only come about through honest mediation by the US." Moussa added that there is "talk" that US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will hold talks with Arafat and Netanyahu in Europe, "but it has not been decided yet when or where".

Summing up the situation, Moussa said: "The Israeli refusal continues, and our refusal of Israel's refusal still stands."

A sense of frustration is prevailing in Cairo over the continuing paralysis of the peace process. Cairo had not expected that a deal would be struck at last week's Washington meetings that would get the process back on track. But listening to Yasser Arafat's "disappointing account" of what happened in the White House made it crystal clear that things were moving from bad to worse and that it was very unlikely that anything positive would unfold in the near future — unless perhaps the Palestinians agreed to make further concessions.

Several sources drew the same conclusion from the negative outcome of the Washington meetings: the Israelis are not prepared to soften their hard-line policies. "The bottom line now is that we are stuck with [Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin] Netanyahu, that he is clearly a man opposed to the principle of land-for-peace and that the Americans, Russians and Europeans do not seem able to get Netanyahu to change," a source said.

But Cairo will await the outcome of more high-level American-Israeli and American-Palestinian meetings planned for the next two weeks. Sources say that they are not excluding all hopes that somehow some positive results will miraculously be achieved. But, for the sake of being realistic, they work under the strong assumption that nothing concrete will emerge.

"The problem is that although the Americans offered some ideas, they do not really amount to a full-fledged plan. These ideas revolve around pressing the Palestinians into showing greater patience with Netanyahu and speeding up the implementation of further Israeli security demands," said one source. He added that Arafat does not seem to be in a position to make further concessions — particularly the type demanded by Netanyahu.

Another source said: "I do not think that Arafat is willing to make concessions just to get things rolling."

The source said that Egypt views the current paralysis as "extremely alarming". Equally alarming is Netanyahu's way of jumping the final status talks by forging ahead with building settlements and working on maps that keep about 70 per cent of the West Bank's area to the Israelis.

So, what are the chances of Egypt stepping in?

Official sources describe this as a remote possibility. "There was a time last summer when presidential adviser Osama El-Baz spent a substantial amount of time and effort shuttling between Jericho and Tel Aviv, but that led nowhere," a source said. The same source added that he would be surprised if Jordan was prepared to undertake a serious mediation effort, although it might "convey to the Palestinians its impressions about the US and Israeli offers."

Who then would break the stalemate? According to the agreements signed by Israel and the Palestinians, a Palestinian-Israeli liaison committee should deal with the problem of implementation. "Obviously, this has failed," the source said. "As for international arbitration, which the Palestinians at certain points suggested, it is a matter that could only be undertaken by the mutual consent of both parties. Obviously, the Israelis would not agree to it," the source said.

An Arab summit conference perhaps? The answer is a yes-and-no.

The Palestinians say they want it and have asked Egypt to call for one. But Cairo has been hesitant and has tried to persuade the Palestinians that a summit may not be the best option. "When you think of it, you would not want to unduly get yourself in a situation where you would be accused of ganging up against Israel — particularly when you are sure that you will not gain from this summit much more than what you got out of the June 1996 summit," a source said. "Unless you are talking about sending a message of Arab solidarity."

Sources explain that it would be very difficult to get someone like Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad to sit down with the Emir of Qatar, which hosted last November a regional economic cooperation conference.

Also, there is the very sensitive question of calling for a summit that excludes Iraq at a time when Cairo seems to be cautiously warming up to the idea of supporting the Iraqi people — irrespective of its view of the ruling Iraqi regime.

Other factors need to be taken into consideration. "You have to think of what is happening in the White House and whether Bill Clinton will survive or Al Gore will take over and start a completely new game," a source said. He added: "You also have to think of what the US administration will be doing about Iraq because certainly a strike against Iraq will add an entirely new dimension."

But that is not to say that the idea of a summit is not there and that it is not being discussed. And Cairo must not necessarily be its sponsor. The Palestinians could call for a meeting and ask any Arab capital they wish to host it. The Jerusalem Committee — chaired by Moroccan monarch King Hassan — could also call the summit. King Hassan is scheduled to arrive in Cairo around mid-February for talks with President Hosni Mubarak, in which the Palestinian issue is sure figure highly on the agenda.

Egyptian lawyer slams French law

An Egyptian lawyer who took part in the defence of Roger Garaudy believes that the core of the problem rests with the Gayssot Law. Ali El-Ghateet spoke to **Amira Ibrahim** by telephone from London

While Arab intellectuals were busy debating what should be done to support Roger Garaudy, an Egyptian lawyer made an appearance before the Paris tribunal to defend the French thinker. "I was fully aware of the issues raised in his book and it was quite important to me, as a person and as a lawyer, to explore to what extent I would be allowed to perform my duty," Ali El-Ghateet told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. He referred to Garaudy's book *The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics*.

"It was not a question of volunteering but of performing a duty," Ghateet said, adding that he wrote to Garaudy and his French lawyer, Jacques Verges, expressing his readiness to help, an offer which they accepted.

"The presiding judge decided that it was important for the trial and for the course of justice to permit foreign attorneys to defend Garaudy, who had only one lawyer as opposed to 16 lawyers for his accusers," Ghateet said.

Ghateet believes that Garaudy, by publishing his book, sought to "confront" the Gayssot Law, which penalises any attempt to deny the Jews' alleged right to the holy land. It also penalises any attempt to deny the Holocaust, that six million Jews were killed by the Nazis, and any attempt to question the judgments passed at the Nuremberg war criminals' tribunal.

"Even if Garaudy is found innocent, this law will remain as a sword hanging over the neck of anybody who dares defend Arab rights," Ghateet said. "This law is unprecedented. It suppresses the truth, freedom of expression and scientific research."

In his presentation to the court, Ghateet described the law as unconstitutional, insisting that Garaudy exercised a constitutional right when he questioned the scope of the Holocaust.

"The problem does not rest with Garaudy but with the law which penalises those who carry out scientific research and express their views," Ghateet said. "This means that France has violated its obligations under international and European conventions on the protection of human rights."

Ghateet said that if Garaudy is found guilty, the case will go to the Court of Appeals. If he is found guilty again, the matter will be taken up by the Court of Cassation. Ghateet did not rule out the possibility that the constitutionality of the Gayssot Law might be considered by the European Court of Human Rights.

Garaudy is accused of denying crimes against humanity and questioning the judgments passed at the Nuremberg trial. A third charge of anti-Semitism was dropped. Prosecutors asked that he be fined 150,000 French francs.

"The Zionist groups which filed the lawsuit against Garaudy are more concerned with upholding the Gayssot Law than with punishing him," Ghateet said. "They may invoke a minimum penalty but the question remains that this law must be abolished."

Ghateet said that more action and more active support are needed for Garaudy and the cause he stands for. "It is the obligation of the people who have a vision of what is happening in this part of the world to approach the matter with greater seriousness and show active support in financial, legal and moral terms," he said.

Mufti confirms death sentences

The Supreme State Security Court has confirmed death sentences against three Islamist militants and condemned others to varying terms of imprisonment. **Khaled Dawoud** reports

The Supreme State Security Court on Tuesday upheld death sentences passed a month earlier against three Islamist militants, on trial with 30 others, for killing 26 policemen in southern Egypt in 1993 and 1994. Two of those condemned to die are still at large. The third is paralysed.

According to Egyptian law, death sentences passed by civilian courts do not become final until they are approved by the Grand Mufti, the nation's top Muslim religious authority. The approval is a matter of procedure and is usually granted in cases of murder convictions.

Chief Judge Ismail Hamdi said the mufti had approved the death penalty for the three and announced the sentences passed against the other defendants.

Four were sentenced to life [25 years] imprisonment with hard labour, three to 15 years, five to 10 years and three to five years. Thirteen defendants were acquitted. Charges against two others, who died in shootouts with police, were dropped. According to prosecutors, the defendants are members of Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, Egypt's largest militant organisation which took responsibility for the 17 November Luxor massacre, in which 58 tourists and four Egyptians were killed.

The defendants were accused of staging dozens of attacks in Upper Egypt in 1993 and 1994, in which 26 policemen, including five senior officers, were killed. They were also accused of the attempted murder of 46 other policemen, planting bombs outside banks in Assiut, attacking a bus carrying a number of Romanian industrial experts and attempting to blow up a train carrying tourists.



Gama'a militants awaiting to be sentenced in Tuesday's hearing — photo: Ayman Ibrahim

Before announcing the verdicts, Judge Hamdi read out a statement lashing out at Islamist militants. He said their violence violated "the tolerant principles of the Islamic religion" and that they were rejected by all Egyptians.

"They crowned themselves as leaders and scholars, imposing their will on the people and gave themselves the right to terrorise others," the judge said. "In order to reach their goal, which is power, they do not care about killing innocent people or destroying the state and its economy. They deserve to be punished."

The lawyers of the defendants said they were satisfied with the sentences. "These are fair sentences and clearly show the difference between civilian and military courts," said Saad Hasaballah, an Islamist lawyer.

Sentences passed by state security and military courts cannot be appealed and need the approval of only the president of the republic. Military courts, however, are known for their speedy procedures and harsh sentences, including death penalties.

Hasaballah said he will file a request for clemency with the president's office.

The only attending defendant who received a death sentence, Hassan Khalifa, is paralysed after being injured in a shoot-out with police. The mufti rejected an appeal by his lawyers to commute the death sentence because of his injury. But judicial sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that because of Khalifa's paralysis, the death sentence might not be carried out. Under Egyptian law, someone condemned to death must be in good health if he is to be executed.

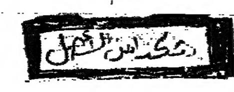
Ahmed Diaa, one of those sentenced to life imprisonment, said he had no regrets. "When I did what I am accused of, I was certain that I was doing it to please God. Therefore, I have no regrets," he told reporters from the iron cage where the defendants were kept.

The defendants were driven to the Bab El-Khalq court in Fatimid Cairo under tight security and were accompanied by two armoured vehicles. Dressed in white prison uniforms, they brandished copies of the Qur'an with one hand and flashed the victory sign with the other. They shouted slogans and chanted songs, declaring their readiness to die for the sake of Islam.

Both Diaa and Khalifa told reporters after the verdicts were announced that they supported a cease-fire initiative made last July by jailed Gama'a leaders, who urged their followers to halt anti-government attacks. The initiative was rejected by Gama'a expatriates, who insisted that the government must release thousands of jailed militants and stop putting them on military trials before they consider a halt to the violence.

Diaa denied there were any divisions within the Gama'a and said that differences concerning the cease-fire initiative were a result of "lack of communication and coordination" between the jailed and expatriate leaders.

Khalifa appealed to the expatriates to support the jailed leaders' initiative, insisting that the ones in prison are the true leaders of the group.



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'This is not Law 93'

Although the Press Syndicate's council condemned a new law that makes the publication of new newspapers conditional on the cabinet's approval, its chairman told **Shaden Shehab** that more time was needed to determine the pros and cons

A controversy appears to be brewing at the Press Syndicate concerning a new law that regulates the establishment of joint stock companies, including newspaper publishing firms. The law, which was approved by the People's Assembly on 17 January, makes the establishment of joint stock companies in the areas of press publications, satellite broadcasting and remote sensing conditional on the cabinet's prior approval. The law, which is an amendment to Law 59 for 1981, exempts companies operating in other areas from this proviso.

A day after the law gained the Assembly's approval, the Press Syndicate's council condemned the bill in a statement at an extraordinary meeting. It said the law imposed restrictions on the freedom of the press in violation of the provisions of the Constitution and appealed to President Hosni Mubarak not to sign it. The statement also appealed to Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and Assembly Speaker Fathi Sorour to reconsider.

Mubarak signed the new law last week, making it effective.

"We have to be reasonable in dealing with the problem and look at the pros and cons of this law," Makram Mohamed Ahmed, the Syndicate's chairman, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "This is not Law 93 which provided harsh penalties for offending journalists and was a clear violation of the freedom of the press. This is entirely different."

Ahmed conceded that the new law was "an administrative restriction on the freedom of establishing newspapers, which constitutes a part of the freedom of the press." But he went on: "My personal view, which is not necessarily that of the Syndicate's council, is that we have to open a dialogue with the government so that each party may put forward its viewpoint. I think that the government has good reasons for passing this law, mainly to prevent foreigners from establishing newspapers for political and security considerations. Egypt is targeted by some countries which seek to misinform Egyptian public opinion."

Government officials have argued that the amended articles of the Companies Law are primarily aimed at introducing a simplified system for the establishment of companies with the objective of encouraging investments and promoting development. They also contended that the amended article which requires three types of companies to gain the cabinet's prior approval is mainly intended to bring order to the burgeoning newspaper market and ensure that these companies do not pose a threat to national security.

However, some journalists and opposition deputies believe the amendment was in violation of the Constitution's articles 48, 206 and 209, which guarantee press freedom and democracy. They also believe that the law should have been referred to the Shura Council for approval. Laws that are considered to be supplements to the Constitution require the approval of both the People's Assembly and Shura Council.

Fawzia Abdel-Sattar, former head of the Assembly's legislative committee, told the *Weekly* that the new law did not violate the Constitution. "The Constitution guarantees press freedom within the limits of the law," she said. "The new law does not curtail press freedom. It simply regulates the establishment of newspapers and this does not violate the Constitution."

Abdel-Sattar also said that there was no need to gain the approval of the Shura Council because the law is not a supplement to the Constitution.





President Mubarak honours the memory of police officers who died in the line of duty by decorating their names during Police Day celebrations (l); addressing religious leaders and scholars

Confronting terrorism

On two occasions this week, President Mubarak lashed out at terrorist groups and urged a true understanding of Islamic teachings. **Nevine Khalil** reports

Speaking to police forces and religious leaders at separate functions this week, President Hosni Mubarak affirmed that terrorism must be confronted by force as well as a sound propagation of Islamic tenets.

During Police Day celebrations on Sunday, Mubarak said that security forces have learned from their mistakes and were able to "contain the dangers" posed by militant groups. These forces, Mubarak added, have fought "brave battles for years against terrorist groups which sold themselves to the devil and conspired to carry out schemes, masterminded from abroad, with the aim of hindering Egypt's progress."

Alluding to last November's Luxor massacre in which 58 foreigners and four Egyptians were killed, Mubarak said, "The mistakes of the past should not lower our esteem of the heroic efforts made by the security forces." He added that these forces are capable of learning from "past experiences" and that Egypt's "patriotic army supports the people's struggle [against terrorism] and protects its stability and development."

Police forces dealt crippling blows to the infrastructures of militant groups, infiltrated their organisations, confiscated their funds, and reined in their activities, according to Mubarak. "Now these groups are isolated cells in limited areas, who exploit any opportunity to carry out their heinous crimes," he added. Mubarak said that Egypt's democratic environment "allows all legal political trends to work, whereas the illegal terrorist groups do not have one ounce of support or sympathy" from the public.

On a hopeful note, Mubarak assured his audience that Egypt will "regain the world's confidence very quickly [and] will be able to deal with the current problems."

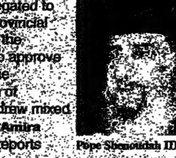
A day earlier, in a speech on the occasion of *Leilat Al-Qadr* (Night of Power), Mubarak called on his audience of religious leaders and academics to "burnish the true image of Islam to the younger generations, in order to set straight their understanding of religion". He asked them to emphasise that Islam "aims for greater, comprehensive targets and not the bits and pieces which are propagated by narrow-minded, self-serving individuals."

"The threat of black terrorism has the entire Islamic nation in jeopardy," he warned, "and opens the door to foreign conspiracies". He described terrorists "who claim to be preachers of Islam" as "traitors of their people and agents of the enemies of God and His Prophet". Mubarak said that it was the duty of every Islamic country and all Muslims "not to extend their hands to the bloodstained hands [of the terrorists]."

The president addressed another challenge facing the Islamic nation, namely "the world's perception of Islam and attempts to tarnish its image". He said that it is the "duty of all our scholars and intellectuals to build bridges with other cultures."

Hamayoni edict decentralised

A presidential decree which delegated to city and provincial governors the authority to approve or reject the renovation of churches drew mixed reactions. **Amira Howeidy** reports











Pope Shenoudah III — Abdel-Kader — Ibrahim — Sadek

President Hosni Mubarak issued a decree last week that delegated to city and provincial governors the authority to make decisions on the renovation of Christian churches. Previously, this authority was in the president's own hands. The president, however, retained the prerogative of licensing the construction of new churches.

Although the decree was obviously meant to facilitate the complicated and lengthy process churches had to go through before any request for renovation or repairs is approved, questions were raised about keeping the licensing of new churches as a prerogative of the head of the state.

This prerogative, derived from what is known as the Hamayoni edict, dates back to the 19th century and, despite many constitutional changes since then, has remained in force. Egyptian Christians and many Muslim intellectuals and political figures have repeatedly called for its abolition.

Pope Shenoudah III, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, was quoted by the Arabic-language press as saying he "welcomed" any decision that aims at facilitating the process of renovating or repairing churches. He also thanked President Mubarak for issuing the decree.

The Egyptian Society for the Promotion of National Unity hailed the decree as a "positive step toward solving the problems the Copts have suffered from for long." But other Copts were not similarly excited.

"He who has the right to approve also has the right to reject the renovation of churches," Maurice Sadek, head of the National Unity Human Rights Centre, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Under any circumstances, this entire process, whether the authority is in the president's hands or the governors' hands, is unconstitutional."

Sadek argued that there is no provision in the Constitution that gives any government official the authority to approve or reject the renovation or construction of churches. "This makes the decision to delegate the authority to governors unconstitutional," he said.

Sadek said, "The first article of the 1923 Constitution provided for the abolition of all the Hamayoni decrees issued during the Ottoman era. So why is the renovation and construction of churches singled out? In order to comply with the Constitution, both in letter and spirit, the regulations governing the restoration and construction of churches should be covered by the construction law and not by an unconstitutional Ottoman decree."

The Hamayoni edict requires the presentation of papers providing information on the distance between the land on which a new church is to be built and Christian and Muslim inhabited areas. It also requires information on whether there are other churches belonging to the same religious denomination in the same town or village, the number of Christians in the area and the distance between the nearest church belonging to the same religious denomination and the town in which the new church is to be built.

There are no available official statistics on the number of churches in Egypt, but independent sources and experts on Coptic affairs put the number at between 2,400 and 4,000. Sadek pointed out, however, that there are no churches in the newly-built satellite cities such as Sixth of October, Tenth of Ramadan and Shorouq.

Saadeddin Ibrahim, head of the Ibn Khaldoun Centre for Social Studies, views Mubarak's decree as significant, and possibly a prelude to the abolition of the Hamayoni edict altogether.

Mubarak, Ibrahim said, "has inherited a legacy of de facto discrimination and I believe he is trying to redress this situation, but chooses to do it gradually."

But for Sadek, the decision will put governors in a "hot spot" if they turn down a renovation request, particularly in Upper Egypt provinces with large Christian populations, such as Minya and Assiut.

Observers cited an incident in the Nile Delta province of Sharqiya last year when Muslim rioters burned down parts of a church after they found out that the local priest was building a small extension. "These are isolated incidents and do not reflect the situation on the ground," Minya Governor Mustafa Abdel-Kader told the *Weekly*. "Everything is done in accordance with the law," he said. "If the renovation of a church is permissible under the regulations in force, we approve it. The opposite is also true."

Leftist sheikh faces prosecution

Can we or can we not talk about Islamic history in objective, scientific terms, and who will define those terms? Questions once again brought to the fore by the recent confiscation of two books written by Khalil Abdel-Kerim. **Fatemah Farag** reports



Abdel-Kerim

On 14 January, police swooped on offices of the Dar Sina publishing firm, situated off Qasr Al-Aini Street, and confiscated Shiekh Khalil Abdel-Kerim's latest books, *Yathreb's Society: Relations Between Men and Women* and *The Situation at the Time of the Prophet's Companions*. The confiscation was ordered by the state security prosecutor, who had received a report from Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Academy claiming that the books included remarks defaming the Prophet Mohamed's companions or *sahaba*.

Officials at Al-Azhar were unavailable for comment.

The confiscation is particularly significant for several reasons. Both books have been on the market for almost a year and had been on display at the 1997 Cairo Book Fair. Abdel-Kerim, a well-known lawyer, human rights activist and author of several research papers and books on the history of Islam, said, "The confiscation order was directed only at the first part of the second book, which is made up of three parts, and yet all three were confiscated. As for the first book, well, the second edition was almost sold out!"

Secondly, there is the nature of Abdel-Kerim himself. Labelled the "red sheikh" because he is a member of the leftist Tagammu Party, Abdel-Kerim is known for his liberal interpretation of Islam. Over the past 15 years, he has published several books, all of which may have been criticised by some, but were never deemed to warrant legal action.

Squeezed behind his desk in his small two-room office in the underprivileged neighbourhood of Boulaq El-Dakrour, Abdel-Kerim, nearly 70, bends forward. The dark circles on his forehead — tell-tale signs of frequent prayers — do not leave a secularist impression. "I have been criticised before by people who said that I search in the garbage bins of history for the material I use in my books. My response is that I use only the sources acceptable to, and used by, Al-Azhar itself. The first book is only 100 pages but is based on more than 60 sources," he said.

Abdel-Kerim finds it ironic that "disseminating extremist ideology" was the legal grounds cited as the reason why he was summoned for questioning. "Me? After 15 years of writing against extremist thought, I am now being investigated solely on the grounds of this explanation?"

Thirdly, there is the timing. The intellectual community had breathed a sigh of relief after a Cairo court reversed a confiscation order against Sayed El-Qimni's book, *Rab El-Zaman* (The Lord of All Time). But the latest confiscations had intellectuals worrying again.

Al-Azhar's report against Abdel-Kerim's books dates back to last year. Last May, about six months after the books were published, a photocopy of the Islamic Research Academy's report appeared in the Saudi newspaper *Al-Muslimoun*. According to Abdel-Kerim, the report condemned 196 books, including some of his. "My books were lumped together with pornography and other stuff," he said, adding, "However, the publicity was good for sales."

After some commotion in the local press, no legal action was taken. "Consequently, I was surprised on 14 January when I received a phone call from Rawya Abdel-Azim, owner of the publishing house, telling me that she had been summoned to the prosecutor's office, after the confiscation, for questioning and that I had to go for questioning as well. I cannot understand that, in this day and age, they would resort to something so ineffective and so backward as confiscation."

On 18 January Abdel-Kerim was forced to spend the whole day being questioned by a police officer who had diligently read his book. "We discussed the first book and he had notes and page-markers all over. Actually, his questions were smarter than the ones contained in Al-Azhar's report," Abdel-Kerim said.

Abdel-Kerim contends that Al-Azhar's accusations are unreasonable and unfounded. "They say that I make up stories but, in fact, I look objectively and scientifically at history. The companions of the Prophet were not saints and, according to Imam Malek, anyone can be criticised except the Prophet," Abdel-Kerim said.

One of his most controversial stories concerns the Rightly Guided Caliph Omar Ibn Al-Khattab. He recounts that Omar advised people not to ask for large dowries in order to make marriage easier and yet he himself paid 40,000 dirhams as the dowry for a girl 40 years his junior. Abdel-Kerim points out, "I am recounting history and the *sahaba* were people with strong and weak points. But Al-Azhar says I am accusing Omar of contradicting himself."

Why are the clerics so upset? Abdel-Kerim says his research is threatening to those who have been brought up in a culture based on rote memorisation and not innovative thinking. "So anything which challenges what they say is very threatening. Even enlightened generations, like Mohamed Hussein Heikal and Abbas El-Aqqad, never went beyond certain traditional confines. Then came a generation made up of people such as myself, Said El-Ashmawi, Sayed El-Qimni and Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid who started to challenge these confines through objective and scientific study. Of course it makes them nervous."

All the people mentioned by Abdel-Kerim have been subjected to one form or another of harassment. In 1992, an Azharite committee went to the Cairo Book Fair and confiscated five of Ashmawi's books. Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid was put on trial before a court that found him to be an apostate who must be divorced from his wife. Finally, there was the El-Qimni trial last September, but the court reversed the confiscation order against his book.

Abdel-Kerim believes that an amendment of Law 106, which regulates Al-Azhar's activities, could be the answer to the problem. "The article dealing with the Islamic Research Academy should make it clear that its jurisdiction covers only the contents of the Qur'an and anthologies of the Prophet's sayings, not everything published on anything."

Abdel-Kerim is currently awaiting a summons from the prosecutor who is expected to question him about his second book.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Al-Ahram Weekly

Amman slaughter: who done it?

Jordanian sources are suggesting that Oday Saddam Hussein might be behind the brutal killing of an Iraqi diplomat and seven others in Amman nearly two weeks ago. A special correspondent for *Al-Ahram Weekly* reports from the Jordanian capital

While Jordanian security authorities continued their search for suspects in connection with the murders of an Iraqi diplomat and seven other people in Amman on 18 January, informed Jordanian sources have been claiming that the incident was deliberately staged with the help of the Iraqi Ambassador to Jordan, Nuri Oweiss.

Although observers and political commentators spent the better part of last week debating the possible motives behind the crime, sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, have stressed that the murders were the work of a group close to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's son Oday. The sources said feuds between different groups within the ruling family are likely to have played a part in last week's incident. The feuds were reportedly linked to the flight of Saddam Hussein's son-in-law Hussein Kamel to Amman two years ago. Kamel died mysteriously at the hands of members of his own family upon his sudden return to Iraq last year.

One security source said Iraq's Ambassador, Oweiss, telephoned his deputy, the soon-to-be-murdered diplomat Hikmat Abdul-Razak Al-Hajou, on his cellular phone and ordered him to deliver a passport and visa to Sami Thomas George, another of the eventual victims, at his home in the fashionable Rabia district of Amman at around midnight on Saturday.

Other sources, who cite the same instructions allegedly given by Oweiss but differ as to the circumstances, said that while Hajou and his wife (who was also among the victims) were driving the ambassador home around midnight on Saturday, he ordered them to deliver the same documents to the home of George immediately after they had dropped him at his residence.

Both sources said it was not an altogether extraordinary demand, even considering the late hour, because Hajou and George were friends.

Confirming that Hajou had apparently showed up at the George villa to deliver some sort of message late on Saturday, forensic experts said the eight victims were killed over a period of two to three hours and that Hajou was the last to be murdered.

According to police, Hajou, his Egyptian wife Laila Mohamed Shaaban, George, another Iraqi businessman Namir Shaker Ouji, Sadeq Siddik Salim, Edmond, an Egyptian security guard Mohamed Abdullah Hindawi and another Egyptian national, Shabour Al-Sayed Mohamed Sulieman, were all chained up and slowly stabbed to death.

Police are questioning a Greek woman, Anistassia Lidaki, 37, a friend of businessman George, who survived the attack with several stab wounds and is providing crucial evidence as to the identity of the murderers, according to a Jordanian security source.

Lidaki told authorities she heard four or five attackers speaking with a distinct Iraqi accent. The murders follow two other developments that have served to further strain ties between Amman and Baghdad: the 8 December executions in Baghdad of four Jordanians accused of smuggling spare auto parts, and the attempted shooting of the Iraqi commercial attaché in Amman earlier this month.

The Jordanian government's initial reaction to the latest killings was to condemn the crime, calling it an attack on Jordan.

"We strongly condemn an attack of this nature, for whatever reason and whatever motives. It is also an attack on our country and as such is unacceptable," Prime Minister Abdel-Salam Al-Majali was quoted as saying by state television.

Majali dismissed suggestions that the attack was in revenge for the hanging of the four Jordanians.

"It has no link with that, at least until now, and we do not expect to find one. I think it is a separate incident," Majali said.

The allegations of a plot involving the Iraqi ambassador are consistent with statements made on state radio by Jordan's official spokesman, who said that the kingdom would not tolerate feuding on its lands.

"Jordan, which God has blessed with security and stability, will not allow its territory to be used as an arena for the settling of scores, whatever the background," the spokesman said.

Members of the Jordanian business community have privately expressed concern that the murders may negatively impact the local business climate and scare off investors already weighing up the risks of a collapse in the Middle East peace talks and renewed regional flare-ups. Nadhmi Ouji, brother of victim Namir Ouji, is reported to be the single largest private foreign investor in Jordan with projects in excess of $150 million.

Meanwhile, the British Embassy in Amman Sunday confirmed that the Jordanian government has sought the help of Scotland Yard in connection with the incident. Jordan's Minister of the Interior, however, denied that any such request has been made.

The embassy said the assistance from Scotland Yard would be restricted to providing information on Iraqi nationals. A spokesman for the embassy did not elaborate.

Also Sunday a circular issued by Jordan's Attorney General stated that the Jordanian media are henceforth prohibited from reporting on the "Rabia case". It added that any violators would be prosecuted.

Pressure for Algerian probe mounts

Offering only sympathy, the EU will do little to salvage Algeria. But, writes Amira Howeidy, its demand for an inquiry may still be a step forward

Is Europe's sudden excitement over the daily spectacle of carnage in Algeria already over? Not quite. Despite the European Union's declaration on Monday that "if Algeria wants help, it has to ask for it", the EU troika mission the previous week came back having reinforced their belief that there has to be an international inquiry into the massacres rocking the country. The mission has also encouraged a stepping-up of demands for independent investigation, which have since been voiced by Austria, Algeria's opposition party the Front for Socialist Forces (FFS) and the EU itself, which has urged Algeria to "open its doors to international help to combat terrorism."

The Arab Organisation for Human Rights (AOHR) also issued a statement earlier this week, saying that if the Algerian government was unwilling to respond to calls for international investigation, it has to allow a local independent inquiry by Algerian human rights groups to investigate the massacres and define who is behind the brutal killings.

"The [EU foreign] council calls for greater transparency on the part of the government of Algeria about the situation in which terrorist groups continue to perpetrate cowardly and brutal attacks on innocent civilians," the 15-member bloc's foreign ministers said in a statement following a meeting in Brussels last Monday.

The meeting was briefed on a visit to Algeria by EU state ministers for foreign ministers last week during which the Algerian government rejected any calls for an inquiry and offers of humanitarian aid, saying they were "not necessary".

British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, chairing the EU meeting, acknowledged that the brief EU mission achieved only modest results. "Our willingness to help needs to be matched by willingness on the part of the Algerian government to accept our help," Cook told a news conference.

He said that the bloc had succeeded in restarting a dialogue with Algiers, and that the process would most likely continue in the form of talks between Cook and Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf who is expected in London, although there was no firm date set for any meeting. The EU ministers urged Algeria to allow visits by the United Nations and the media.

Over 70 people were blown up or hacked to death last week in Algeria, increasing the Ramadan death toll to almost 2,000.

The violence, which started in 1992 following the army's cancellation of parliamentary elections Islamists were poised to win, has reached an unprecedented level of barbarity over the past month. It is this escalation which finally prompted the EU to take action. Although the Algerian government continues to blame the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) as the sole perpetrators of all the violence and has made no reference to outside support in the past, officials last week told the EU mission it was Islamist networks operating from Europe, rather than the radical GIA alone, that are backing and financing the violence. Algeria's message to the mission was: strike at these networks, or do not interfere.

Pointing out that Europe clearly does not condone or support such networks, the mission refused to call off its demand for an inquiry. On Sunday, Austria's Foreign Minister Wolfgang Schnessel urged the Algerian government to allow an independent investigation to be carried out. In response, the Algerian Foreign Ministry, in a statement made through the official Algerian news agency APS, said the government's policy is and always has been to reject foreign interference in Algeria's internal affairs. The ministry said the government had instructed its ambassador to Austria to make official representations to Vienna concerning Schnessel's remarks.

But Algeria's military-backed government will need more than just angry statements if it is to refute accusations by human rights groups that it is at worst party to, at best complicit in, the daily massacres.

The testimony of Algerian exiles and refugees which has lately appeared in the French and British press has added more fuel to this fire. Further doubt has been cast on the credibility of the Algerian government in the British media, following statements by former Algerian Prime Minister Abdel-Hamid Brahimi and others before the British parliament blaming the Algerian government for the violence.



A child victim of terrorism in Algeria shows the toys she received from the Red Crescent two days before *Eid El-Fitr* which marks the end of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan *(photo: AFP)*

Testifying before the all-party Parliamentary Human Rights Group, they accused the Algerian government of systematic torture and France of blocking moves to find out what was really happening on what one witness called "Europe's blood-soaked doorstep."

Brahimi, who was prime minister from 1984 to 1988, told the hearing "the terror is organised by the state... the GIA is a part of and invention of the government," he said, comparing it to dummy nationalist guerrilla groups set up by the French during the war against the FLN independence movement 40 years ago.

Back home, the FFS has continued its campaign for an international UN-supervised investigation. FFS spokesman Samir Bou'aquier told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview from Algiers that despite the EU mission's failure to persuade the government to allow such an inquiry, the fact that the mission did indeed go to Algeria despite strong resistance from officials, "means that with more pressure, an independent investigation can be carried out."

It was the FFS's Switzerland-based leader Hocine Ayat Ahmed who made the first call for an international investigation last summer. "Who would have thought that this isolated call would have become the demand on everyone's lips today?" Bou'aquier asked.

Conciliation or confrontation in Sudan?

***Khartoum is on a collision course with civic groups and professional associations, writes* Gamal Nkrumah**

The 28th of Ramadan is a hallowed memorial day for Sudanese women who have lost sons, husbands, fathers and brothers at the hands of the Islamist regime of Sudanese President General Omar Hassan Al-Bashir. Every year, hundreds of women demonstrate to mark the day, in 1990, that the regime summarily executed their loved ones.

This year, in anticipation of a heavy-handed government clampdown, the women decided to hold their demonstration a few days earlier, on 24 Ramadan. Police broke up the demonstration and two women were arrested, Samira Karrar, a 45-year-old housewife, whose husband and brother were executed on 28 Ramadan, 1990 and Nafisa Al-Meleek, a 70-year-old headmistress whose son was executed on the same day.

"The arrests, coupled with the recent government decision to close down all Sudanese universities because of student unrest, flies in the face of government allegations that social activism is on the wane," said Farouk Abu Eissa, secretary-general of the Cairo-based Arab Lawyers Federation. Abu Eissa is also the official spokesman of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the Asmara-based umbrella organisation that groups together several northern opposition parties and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the leading southern rebel group.

Abu Eissa told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "The dominance of the ruling National Islamic Front's (NIF) corrupt oligopoly means that it will not go down quietly. They will defend to the end their privileges. Pressure on the government should be stepped up."

Abu Eissa, reflecting divisions within the Sudanese opposition, warned against undercutting these efforts by conciliatory statements issued by the head of the NDA, Sadig Al-Mahdi. "Until this issue of undercutting our efforts is resolved, no attempt to tackle the underlying political problems will be successful."

Al-Mahdi, a former prime minister, counters that the opposition's concerns should be calmly, but strongly, expressed. Last week, there was a backlash against Al-Mahdi because of conciliatory statements towards the Islamist regime he made at a public gathering in Cairo of NDA leaders and their supporters, suggesting that it was time to make amends with the regime. Al-Mahdi suggested that Egypt might be a good mediator between the NDA and the government. However, his cousin and second-in-command of the Umma Party, Mubarak Al-Fadel Al-Mahdi, issued statements indicating that he was against reconciliation with the regime.

"In my opinion, the NIF is not like the military dictatorships of General Abbud or Gaafar Numeiri. They are not ready to relinquish power and do not want to compromise. So we have little room to manoeuvre in. We must fight them till the bitter end," Mubarak Al-Mahdi told the *Weekly*.

In Khartoum a letter signed by Abel Alair, former Sudanese vice president and leading southern Sudanese political figure, Ghazi Suleiman, chairman of the National Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy, and Adel Mahmoud Hag Saleh, a former minister of justice, called for the independence of the judiciary and the speeding up of the re-election of the governing body of the council of the Bar Association. It was presented to President Al-Bashir.

"Women who participated in the peaceful demonstration protesting against the forcible conscription of their sons in military operations in the war zones of eastern and southern Sudan, and students rioting in the streets are signs that the regime is under intense pressure from ordinary Sudanese people," Abu Eissa told the *Weekly*.

"In the past, several regimes have been forced out because of intensified public unrest and civil strife. [Former President Gaafar] Numeiri's government was brought down because of similar demonstrations. We, the progressive forces in Sudan, believe that this time we should not give the NIF regime a chance to rig votes at elections of trade union members and professional associations. We cannot extend the olive branch to such an oppressive regime. They must step down unconditionally," Abu Eissa said.

The Sudanese Lawyers Union, the Association of Sudanese Academics, the Sudanese Medical Practitioners Union, the Sudanese Journalists Union and the Sudanese National Trade Union organisation jointly issued a strongly-worded statement in which they accused the "fascist regime" of the NIF of challenging the will of the Sudanese people and Sudanese trade unions and professional associations by rigging election results of the lawyers union last month when government favourite NIF-member Fathi Khalil won the leadership of the predominantly leftist organisation.

The Cairo-based Arab Organisation for Human Rights (AOHR) was among a number of regional and international human rights organisations that condemned the systematic torture and intimidation of lawyers by the Sudanese authorities and the rigging of the Sudanese Lawyers' Union elections.

As Sudan's disaffected women vent their anger and leading political figures protest, the NIF-dominated regime in Khartoum finds itself on the line. There is, however, still a strong possibility that the NIF will hang on regardless. NIF leader Hassan El-Turabi has made a habit of outmanoeuvering opponents. Other leading opposition figures in the NDA warn that the NIF regime will not give up power so easily. Unless Turabi, who is also speaker of the parliament, goes of his own free will, only two forces can push him out. One is a military defeat at the hands of the combined forces of the NDA — which effectively means the SPLA, since it has the largest, most disciplined and best army of the NDA parties. The second would be a groundswell of popular pressure from the streets that will overthrow the regime in a popular uprising or *intifada*.

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**

Border dispute without end

Hopes have been dwindling for progress towards a settlement of the Yemeni-Saudi dispute over the demarcation of their desert border. Hassan Abu Taleb reviews the reasons behind the stalemate

After bilateral negotiations which have lasted for almost two years, there is still no indication of any final agreement between Yemen and Saudi Arabia in their decades-long border dispute. The situation is further obscured by the official blackout on proposals advanced by the two parties for ending the dispute. Statements made on more than one occasion by the Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, indicate that only a few simple points of difference remain. He added that a direct personal meeting with Saudi Arabia's King Fahd would be able to resolve their dispute, and that it should not take long to settle the matter.

The Saudi position, on the other hand, is less optimistic. Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef Bin Abdel-Aziz stated recently that the Saudi stance has not changed, and progress depended entirely on President Saleh and the Yemeni government.

Leaving optimism and pessimism aside for a moment, it is clear that the two countries do not view the settlement of their border dispute in anything like the same light. This is due to the fact that the object of the dispute itself has not been accurately delineated. In other words, the two parties have not agreed upon the scope of their dispute. As a result, each side has presented its own, totally different solution.

This situation has come about despite the memorandum of understanding signed by the two parties in February 1995. That memorandum contained definite principles according to which the dispute over the remaining portions of the border which were not included in the Taif Agreement signed in 1934 could be settled.

The Saudi-Yemeni border starts from a point in the Al-Kharakhir area northwest of Sanaa, and stretches through the desert of the Al-Rub Al-Khali, as far as the junction with the Omani-Yemeni border. In addition, the question of the maritime borders along the Red Sea coast has still to be addressed.

A joint committee was formed for the delineation and demarcation of the border, according to the Taif Treaty, while another ministerial committee was put in charge of the development of cultural and economic relations between the two countries.

In between the signature of the memorandum of understanding and the end of 1997, periodic meetings were regularly held in the two capitals, but they bore little fruit. The deadlock in the committees' work could be blamed on the leaders of the two countries. They preferred to work through a direct approach. They submitted proposals and outlines for political settlements which ignored the two basic principles of historic and legal rights which should be the basis for any viable settlement of border demarcation disputes between two neighbouring countries.

The Yemeni government waived those two principles, in favour of the slogan of reaching a "brotherly" solution based on concessions from both sides. The agreement the Yemenis sought was to be comprehensive, and to combine the demarcation of all borderlines with the definition of a framework for relations between the two countries. That framework was to include the promise of substantial economic and financial support from the Saudi side to help Yemen out of its economic crisis.

Over and above the work of the joint committees, the two countries also directly submitted proposals to each other concerning the demarcation of that part of the borderline that was not included in the Taif Agreement. Despite the scarcity of available details about these proposals, it is obvious that the propositions submitted by the two sides were very different, and that this has made it difficult to reach a compromise that would be acceptable to both. This difficulty may be supposed to lie in the three following interrelated factors.

First: the zone separating the two countries to the south of the desert of Al-Rub Al-Khali remains undefined, and is the subject also of unconfirmed reports that it contains substantial oil reserves. Hence, each side considers that giving up a portion of that region to the other side means relinquishing large potential economic gains. This explains why the border preferred by each side is intended to reflect its sovereignty over the largest possible area of that region.

Second: the whole of the border zone, whether included in the Taif Agreement or not, is traversed by strong social and tribal bonds between groups who officially hold Saudi nationality and others holding Yemeni nationality. In addition, there are areas whose inhabitants hold both nationalities, while the inhabitants of other areas have no specified nationality. This leads to practical difficulties in assigning to either one of the two countries absolute sovereignty over extensive regions of frontier territory, besides the social and security problems which might emerge in this connection.

Third: there is an absence of mutual trust. This can be seen quite clearly in the frequent statements from both sides that the other is establishing new focal points in one or other of the undetermined areas, with a view to proclaiming its sovereignty over them. This lack of trust, together with the border skirmishes, that actually took place in December 1994 and on 17 November 1997, suggests the complexities of the security dimension of the border dispute. There are further more specific Saudi accusations that the common unsecured borders with Yemen are the scene of wide-ranging contraband operations bringing illicit goods into the Saudi kingdom. Hence, any border agreement would have to be accompanied by a clearly defined security agreement to ensure full control over movement of goods and people across common borders.

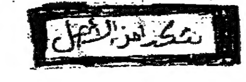
Those three factors cannot be discussed separately from the political situation in Yemen. Since the civil war that began in the summer of 1994 between the government in Sanaa and the Yemeni Socialist Party led by Ali Salem El-Beed in the south, Yemen has been a victim of integral crises and instability. Yemeni opposition parties have continued to be active in the south, and some of their leaders live in Saudi Arabia. Those parties do not share the views of the Yemeni government regarding the resolution of the border conflict. The opposition abroad deny the present Yemeni government has any legitimacy to adjudicate in this matter. Thus, any agreement concluded by Sanaa concerning such sensitive matters as land and potential oil reserves will not be acceptable to them.

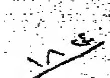
The matter is further complicated by the existence of internal opposition from parties within Yemen itself over the issue of terminating the border dispute. The Yemeni parties see the negotiations that have been conducted by the government as mired in ambiguity and uncertainty. The little information that is available indicates that the government is in fact making major concessions. Yet, paradoxically, the opposition is one of the major obstacles to the government in its attempt to ensure that any concessions over land will be balanced by economic benefits.

For the Saudi government, Yemen's failure to achieve a comprehensive reconciliation between the warring factions within its own country is a considerable obstacle to resolving the border dispute once and for all. It has stopped short, however, of making this a formal condition of any final agreement.

Considering all of these factors together, it seems unlikely that the thorny problem of the Yemeni-Saudi borders will be resolved in the near — or even the foreseeable — future.

The writer is an Arab affairs expert at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.





'Would I ever see my home again?'

In these extracts from his memoir, *Death March*, **Father Audeh Rantisi** remembers the horrific scenes that confronted him, aged 11, when his family were brutally deported from their home of many generations to make what life they could for themselves in the refugee camps of Ramallah



Father Rantisi was born in Lydah, now the site of Ben Gurion Airport, in 1937. From 1955 to 1958 he attended the Bible College of Wales, moving in 1963 to continue his studies at Aurora College in the state of Illinois. He then served as a missionary in Sudan. In 1965 he opened the Evangelical Home for Boys in Ramallah, West Bank. In 1976 Father Rantisi was elected as Ramallah's deputy mayor and he is now the director of the orphanage of the Evangelical Home for Boys. "Death March" faced a strong wave of criticism, orchestrated by the Zionist lobbies, on its first publication in the United States in 1991. His publishers eventually bowed to pressure and decided not to reprint the book. The rights have now reverted to the author. The following extracts are published here courtesy of the Sakakini Cultural Centre.

I cannot forget three horror-filled days in July of 1948. The pain sears my memory, and I cannot rid myself of it no matter how hard I try.

First, Israeli soldiers forced thousands of Palestinians from their homes near the Mediterranean coast, even though some families had lived in the same houses for centuries. (My family had been in the town of Lydda in Palestine at least 1,600 years). Then, without water, we stumbled into the hills and continued for three deadly days. The Jewish soldiers followed, occasionally shooting over our heads to scare us and keep us moving.

Terror filled my eleven-year-old mind as I wondered what would happen. I remembered overhearing my father and his friends express alarm about recent massacres by Jewish terrorists. Would they kill us, too?

We did not know what to do, except to follow orders and stumble blindly up the rocky hills. I walked hand in hand with my grandfather, who carried our only remaining possessions — a small tin of sugar and some milk for my aunt's two-year-old son, sick with typhoid.

The horror began when Zionist soldiers deceived us into leaving our homes, then would not let us go back, driving us though a small gate just outside Lydda. I remember the scene well: thousands of frightened people being herded like cattle through the narrow opening by armed soldiers firing overhead.

In front of me a cart wobbled toward the gate. Alongside, a lady struggled, carrying her baby, pressed by the crowd. Suddenly, in the jostling of the throngs, the child fell. The mother shrieked in agony as the cart's metal-rimmed wheel ran over her baby's neck. That infant's death was the most awful sight I had ever seen.

Outside the gate the soldiers stopped us and ordered everyone to throw all valuables onto a blanket. One young man and his wife of six weeks, friends of our family, stood near me. He refused to give up his money. Almost casually, the soldier pulled up his rifle and shot the man. He fell, bleeding and dying while his bride screamed and cried. I felt nauseated and sick, my whole body numbed by shock waves. That night I cried, too, as I tried to sleep alongside thousands on the ground. Would I ever see my home again? Would the soldiers kill my loved ones, too?

Early the next morning we heard more shots and sprang up. A bullet just missed me and killed a donkey nearby. Everybody started running as in a stampede. I was terror-stricken when I lost sight of my family, and I frantically searched all day as the crowd moved along.

That second night, after the soldiers let us stop, I wandered among the masses of people, desperately searching and calling. Suddenly in the darkness I heard my father's voice. I shouted out to him. What joy was in me! I had thought I would never see him again. As he and my mother held me close, I knew I could face whatever was necessary.

The next day brought more dreadful experiences. Still branded on my memory is a small child beside the road, sucking the breast of its dead mother. Along the way I saw many stagger and fall. Others lay dead or dying in the scorching midsummer heat. Scores of pregnant women miscarried, and their babies died along the wayside.

The wife of my father's cousin became very thirsty. After a long while she said she could not continue. Soon she slumped down and was dead. Since we could not carry her, we wrapped her in cloth, and after praying, just left her beside a tree. I don't know what happened to her body.

We eventually found a well, but had no way to get water. Some of the men tied a rope around my father's cousin and lowered him down, then pulled him out, and gave us water squeezed from his clothing. The few drops helped, but thirst still tormented me as I marched along in the shadeless, one-hundred plus degree heat.

We trudged nearly twenty miles up rocky hills, then down into deep valleys, then up again, gradually higher and higher. Finally we found a main road, where some Arabs met us. They took some of us in trucks to Ramallah, ten miles north of Jerusalem. I lived in a refugee tent camp for the next three and one-half years. We later learned that two Jewish families had taken over our family home in Lydda.

Those wretched days and nights in mid-July of 1948 continue as a lifelong nightmare because Zionists took away our home of many centuries. For me and a million other Palestinian Arabs, tragedy had marred our lives forever.

Throughout his life my father remembered and suffered. For thirty-one years before his death in 1979, he kept the large metal key to our house in Lydda.

After more than four decades I still bear the emotional scars of the Zionist invasion. Yet, as an adult, I see what I did not fully understand then: that the Jews are also human beings, themselves driven by fear, victims of history's worst outrages, rabidly, sometimes almost mindlessly searching for security. Lamentably, they have victimised my people.

Four years after our flight from Lydda I dedicated my life to the service of Jesus Christ. Like me and my fellow refugees, Jesus had lived in adverse circumstances, often with only a stone for a pillow. As with his fellow Jews two thousand years ago and the Palestinians today, an outside power controlled his homeland — my homeland. They tortured and killed him in Jerusalem, only ten miles from Ramallah, my new home. He was the victim of terrible indignities. Nevertheless, Jesus prayed on behalf of those who engineered his death, "Father, forgive them..."

Can I do less?

Arabs, Muslims and the Nazi genocide of the Jews

In this extract from his recent book, **Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri** reflects on the many mutations of anti-semitism in the Western mindset, and interrogates one of the strangest transformations in the history of the 20th century — how, as death approached, the Jews in the Nazi camps became "Muslims"



Years of dispossession

It is important that we, as Arabs — both Muslims and Christians — examine our position towards the Nazi genocide of the Jews. As Muslims and Christians, our stance is incontrovertibly clear. Our religions (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) all contain strong prohibitions against murder. The Qur'an says, "for whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or sewing corruption on earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind." *(The Table Spread: 32)*

The West has attempted to taint Arab history with the Nazi crime as a way of justifying implanting the Zionist settler state at the centre of the Arab World, in order to compensate the Jews for the injustices they suffered within the western cultural formation and the geographical boundaries of Europe. Zionist propaganda, with Western collaboration, employs certain fundamental techniques to accomplish this.

Firstly, Zionist propaganda portrays Arab resistance to the Zionist invasion of Palestine as a form of direct or indirect support for Nazi genocide, on the grounds that the resistance sometimes hampered the entrance of Jewish immigrants into Palestine. This argument is entirely baseless. The Arab resistance was not directed against immigrants in need of refuge; it was directed against settlers who had come to usurp the land and expel its native inhabitants. Many settlers came under Western flags and received the support of the British mandate government (as well as support from the Nazis themselves, a point to which we will return below) at a time when many countries of the West had closed their doors to Jewish refugees. However the Zionists acted towards the original inhabitants (with unreserved Western support), the right to resist them was and remains a legitimate human right, indeed a duty incumbent upon every human being who reveres humanity. Men and women's fight against oppression will always be an indication of their dignity, their greatness and their humanity.

Zionist propaganda is also quick to depict several Arab leaders as Nazi sympathisers. This is another myth. Most Arab governments during the war sided with the Allied powers (since in any case the Arab world fell within their colonial sphere). Moreover, Nazi racist theory put the Arabs and Muslims on a par with the Jews. Therefore, any putative alliance their might have been would have been as pragmatic and temporary as that between Hitler and Stalin. Any sympathy for the Nazis on the part of certain Arab leaders and of certain segments of the Arab public was not motivated by hatred for the Jews nor by any love for the Nazis, but by hostility towards British colonial rule and Zionist colonisation. In all events, it was a naive sympathy, uninformed, lacking adequate knowledge of the nature of the Nazi project, its grounding in Western imperial culture and the extent of its racist contempt for Muslims and Arabs. In no way was such sympathy as existed translated into active participation in the Nazi crime, which remained throughout a properly and exclusively Western phenomenon.

These Western and Zionist aspersions do not alter the geographical, historic, moral, religious and humanitarian facts. Nazi genocide was never a part of Arab or Muslim history. The Arabs and Muslims did not taint their hands with the blood of the Nazis' victims, whether Jews, Slavs or Gypsies. Rather, these attempts to distort the Arab and Muslim image ultimately demonstrate the extent to which the West is consistent with itself. In doing penance for the crime of genocide committed in Germany, it is perpetuating a no less atrocious crime against the Arab World.

Whenever the Muslims and Arabs did come into direct contact with the fact of Nazi genocide, their actions were above reproach. The Muslims in Bulgaria, for example, were very active in protecting Jewish groups from persecution, and King Hussein V of Morocco refused to hand over his Jewish subjects to the Vichy government in France.

In the course of my research for the *Encyclopedia of Jews, Judaism and Zionism*, I was surprised to find how frequently the word *Muselmann* (Muslim) appeared in the Auschwitz concentration camp lists. According to one source, the victims who were led off to the gas chambers were called "aliens" and according to other sources, *Muselmanner*. In the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, I came across the following entry:

"*Muselmann* (Muslim in German) was a commonly used term in the concentration camps, used to refer to the prisoners who were on the brink of death, that is to say those who began to show the final symptoms of starvation, disease, mental apathy and physical weakness. The term was primarily used in Auschwitz, but was also used in other camps."

We see here an epitome of one central dimension of the Western mentality. Whenever it destroys its victims it perceives them as "other," and the other, since the time of the Crusades, has always been the Muslim. In the Middle Ages, moreover, Muslims and Jews were closely linked in the Western mind. One can find, for instance, many paintings which portray the Prophet flogging Christ.

The Nazi experience is an authentic product of this Western mindset. The Nazis were the standard bearers of this vision. They epitomised the Western confrontation with the oriental civilisation closest to Europe: the Islamic civilisation. They never forgot this burden, even when annihilating millions of inhabitants of Europe. The connotation of the term *Muselmann* was simply extended to include the "other" in general, whether Slavs, Jews or Gypsies (as has occurred in a similar manner with the word "Arab" in Zionist discourse). The writer of the preceding entry in the Encyclopedia Judaica attempted to explain how this term came into currency in the camps. The Nazis' victims, he said, would crouch cross-legged in the "oriental" manner and the expression on their faces would be wooden, as lifeless as a mask. One notes that the writer, in his definition, made no attempt to avoid the customary Western stereotype of Muslims. He simply substituted the word "oriental" for *Muselmann*.

The term *Muselmann* as applied to the victims of the Nazi gas chambers brings to the fore two issues, the first practical, the second a question of historical understanding. With regard to the first issue, various news agencies in the Arab/Muslim world should disseminate this piece of information, in order to drive home how the West perceives us. Knowing this can also help us explain why the West felt a compulsion to "compensate" for the crime of Auschwitz with the crimes of Deir Yasin, Kafr Qassem and other Palestinian villages. It is important to stress that this knowledge of the history of the term *Muselmann*, as it has been used to signify the "other" in Nazi Germany and in Palestine. This issue also simultaneously gives rise to another question, concerning the dissemination of information. Information is a powerful tool that can be used to serve the interests of a particular party. Why, one wonders, has the use of the term *Muselmann* in the Nazi concentration camps received such little attention in the press?

Turning to the question of historical understanding, this is a domain in which we are clearly at the mercy of the West. We do not read Western history from our perspective, but rather from their perspective, just as it is fed to us. That is our fault, not the fault of the West. The history books and references are there for all of us to consult. It is up to us to examine these sources and reinterpret the facts, in the light of careful scrutiny of the subtext of their contents and in the light also of newly discovered information, or information that has not previously been accorded the centrality it deserves.

(From: Zionism, Nazism and the End of History (in Arabic), Abdel-Wahab Elmessiri, Dar Al-Sharouk, Cairo, 1997).



Al-Ahram Weekly 29 January - 4 February 1998

The Pope's five day trip to Cuba was a reminder that America could not quite isolate the Caribbean island

Letter from Havana

Assata Shakur, America's most wanted woman who is now exiled in Cuba, sends an open letter to the Pope on the *occasion of his visit to the Caribbean island*



The Pope and Cuban President Fidel Castro exchange niceties in Havana *(photo: Reuters)*

Your Holiness, I hope this letter finds you in good health, in good disposition and enveloped in the spirit of goodness. I must confess that it had never occurred to me before to write to you and I find myself overwhelmed and moved to have this opportunity. Although circumstances have compelled me to reach out to you, I am glad to have this occasion to try and cross the boundaries that would otherwise tend to separate us.

I understand that the New Jersey State Police have written to you and asked you to intervene and to help facilitate my extradition back to the United States. I believe that their request is unprecedented in history. Since they have refused to make their letter to you public, although they have not hesitated to publicize their request, I am completely uninformed as to the accusations they are making against me. Why, I wonder, do I warrant such attention? What do I represent, that is such a threat?

Please let me take a moment to tell you about myself. My name is Assata Shakur *and I was born and raised in the United* States. I am a descendant of Africans who were kidnapped and brought to the Americas as slaves. I spent my early childhood in the racist segregated South. I later moved to the northern part of the country where I realized that Black people were equally victimized by racism and oppression.

I grew up and became a political activist, participating in students' struggles, the anti-war movement, and, most of all, in the movement for the liberation of African Americans in the US. I later joined the Black Panther Party, an organization that was targeted by COINTELPRO, a program that was set up by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to eliminate all political opposition to the US government's policies, to destroy the Black Liberation Movement in the US to discredit activists and to eliminate potential leaders. Under the COINTELPRO program, many political activists were harassed, imprisoned, murdered or *otherwise neutralized. As a result* of being targeted by COINTELPRO, I, like many other young people, was faced with the threat of prison, underground, exile or death.

At this point, I think that it is important to make one thing very clear. I have advocated and I still advocate revolutionary changes in the structure and in the principles that govern the US. I advocate an end to capitalist exploitation, the abolition of racist policies, the eradication of sexism and the elimination of political repression. If that is a crime, then I am totally guilty.

To make a long story short, I was captured in New Jersey in 1973, after being shot with both arms held up in the air, and then shot again from the back. I was left on the ground to die and when I did not, I was taken to a local hospital where I was threatened, beaten and tortured. In 1977 I was convicted in a trial that can only be described as a legal lynching.

In 1979 I was able to escape with the aid of some of my fellow comrades. I saw this as a necessary step, not only because I was innocent of the charges against me, but because I knew that in the racist legal system in the United States I would receive no justice. I was also afraid that I would be murdered in prison. I later arrived in Cuba where I am currently living in exile as a political refugee. Let me emphasize that justice for me is not the issue I am here; it is justice for my people that is at stake. When my people receive justice, I am sure that I will receive it, too. I know that your holiness will reach your own conclusions, but I feel compelled to present the circumstances surrounding the application of "justice" in New Jersey. I am not the first nor the last *person to be victimized* by the New Jersey system of "justice". The New Jersey State Police are infamous for their racism and brutality. Many legal actions have been filed against them and just recently, in a class action legal proceeding the New Jersey *State Police were found guilty of having* an "officially sanctioned, de-facto policy of targeting minorities for investigation and arrest."

Although New Jersey's population is more than 78 percent white, more than 75 percent of the prison population is made up of Blacks and Latinos. Eighty percent of women in New Jersey prisons are women of color. There are 15 people on death row in the state and seven of them are Black. A 1987 study found that New Jersey prosecutors sought the death penalty in 50 percent of cases involving a Black defendant and a white victim, but in only 28 percent of cases involving a Black defendant and a Black victim.

Unfortunately, the situation in New Jersey is not unique, but reflects the racism that permeates the entire country. The United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. There are more than 1.7 million people in US prisons. This number does *not include* the more *than* 500,000 people in city and county jails, nor does it include the alarming number of children in juvenile institutions. The vast majority of those behind bars are people of color and virtually all of those behind bars are poor. The result of this reality is devastating. One third of Black men between the ages of 20 and 29 are either in prison or under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system.

Prisons are big business in the United States and the building, running and supplying of prisons has become the fastest growing industry in the country. Factories are being moved into the prisons and prisoners are being forced to work for slave wages. This super-exploitation of human beings has meant the institutionalization of a new form of slavery. Those who cannot find work on the streets are forced to work in prison. Not only are prisons being used as instruments of economic exploitation, *they also serve as instruments of political* repression.

There are more than 100 political prisoners in the US. They are African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Native Americans, Asians and progressive white people who oppose the policies of the United States government. Many of those targeted by the COINTELPRO program have been in prison since the early 1970s. Although the situation in the prisons is an indication of human rights violations inside the US, there are other, more deadly indicators. There are currently 3,365 people now on death row and more than 50 percent of those awaiting death are people of color.

Black people make up only 13 percent of the population, but we make up 41.01 percent *of persons who have received* the death penalty. The number of state assassinations has increased drastically. In 1997 alone 71 people were executed.

A special reporter assigned by the United Nations Organization found serious human rights *violations* in the US, especially those related to the death penalty. According to these findings, people who were mentally ill were sentenced to death, people with severe mental and learning disabilities, as well as minors under age 18.

Serious racial bias was found on the part of judges and prosecutors. Specifically mentioned in the report was the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal, the only political prisoner on death row, who was sentenced to death because of his political beliefs and because of his work as a journalist, exposing police brutality in the city of Philadelphia. Police brutality is a daily occurrence in our communities. The police have a virtual license to kill and they do kill children, grandmothers, anyone they perceive to be the enemy. They shoot first and ask questions later. Inside the jails and prisons there is at least as much brutality as there was on slave plantations. An ever-increasing number of prisoners are found hanging in their cells.

The United States is becoming more a land more hostile to Black people and other people of color. Racism is running rampant and xenophobia is on the rise. This has been especially true in the sphere of domestic policy. Politicians are attempting to blame social problems on Black people and other people of color. There have been attacks on essentially all affirmative action programs designed to help correct the accumulated results of hundred of years of slavery and discrimination. In addition, the government seems determined to eliminate all social programs that provide assistance to the poor, resulting in a situation where millions of people do not have access to basic health care, decent housing or quality education.

It was with great happiness that I read the Christmas message that your holiness delivered. I applaud you for taking up the cause of the poor, the homeless, the unemployed. The fact that you are addressing *the issues of today, unemployment, home*lessness, child abuse and the drug problem, is important to people all over the world. One third of Black people in the United States live in poverty and our communities are inundated with drugs. We have every reason *to believe that* the CIA and *other* government agencies are involved in drug trafficking. Although we live in one of the richest, most technically-advanced countries in the world, our reality is similar to an undeveloped, Third World country. We are a people who are truly seeking freedom and harmony.

All my life I have been a spiritual person. I first learned of the struggle and the sacrifice of Jesus in the segregated churches of the South. I converted to Catholicism as a *young girl. In my adult life I have become* a student of religion and have studied Christianity, Islam, Asian religions and the African religions of my ancestors. I have come to believe that God is universal in nature, although called different names and with different faces. *I believe* that some people spell God with one 'o' while others spell it with two. What we call God is unimportant, as long as we do God's work.

There are those who want to see God's wrath fall on the oppressed and not on the oppressors. I believe that the time has ended when slavery, colonialism and oppression can be carried out in the name of religion. It was in the dungeons of prison that I felt the presence of God up close, and it has been my belief in God, and in the goodness of human beings that has helped me to survive. I am not ashamed of having been in prison, and I am certainly not ashamed of having been a political prisoner. I believe that Jesus was a political prisoner who was executed because he fought against the evils of the Roman Empire, because he fought the greed of the money changers in the temple, because he fought against the sins and injustices of his time. As a true child of God, Jesus spoke up for the poor, *the meek, the sick and the oppressed.* The early Christians were thrown into lions' dens. I will try and follow the example of so many who have stood up in the face of overwhelming oppression.

I am not writing to ask you to intercede on my behalf. I ask nothing for myself. I only ask you to examine the social reality of the United States and to speak out against the human rights violations that are taking place.

On this day, the birthday of Martin Luther King, I am reminded of all those who gave their lives for freedom. Most of the people who live on this planet are still not free. I ask only that you continue to work and pray to end oppression and political repression. It is my heartfelt belief that all the people on this earth deserve justice; social justice, political justice and economic justice. I believe it is the only way that we will ever achieve peace and prosperity on earth. I hope that you enjoy your visit to Cuba. *This is not a country that is rich in material* wealth, but it is a country that is rich in human wealth, spiritual wealth and moral wealth.

Respectfully yours,
Assata Shakur
Havana, Cuba

The writer, convicted and imprisoned in 1977, escaped from jail in 1979 and fled the US to Cuba. She describes herself as a writer-activist.

Is the Pope Catholic?

Cuban President Fidel Castro received Pope John Paul II in Havana. They shook hands, but which one of them is getting a grip on things, asks **Gamal Nkrumah**

A Roman Catholic, he might well be, but is the Pope catholic? Does the 77-year-old pontiff have a catholic range of interests? Or are his interests narrowly focused on his Catholic flock? The Pope's visit to Cuba last week at the invitation of Cuban President Fidel Castro raised quite a few questions.

One year after the Pope visited Nicaragua on the invitation of the leftist Sandinistas and their leader Daniel Ortega, the Sandanistas were out of office and a "bourgeois democracy" instituted. With leftist ideas sweeping through Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, John Paul II stepped up his diplomatic crusade against leftist priests who espoused liberation theology. During his visit to Nicaragua *the Pontiff* publicly reprimanded a Catholic priest who joined the Sandanista government. Was it not Marx who said, "religion is the opium of the masses"?

Cuba stands at the crossroads of several traditions all rolled into one. Roman Catholicism is just one of many. There are over a million Protestants in Cuba. Roman Catholicism is not even Cuba's main religion. The Caribbean island's real religion is the Orisha tradition — an African religion brought to Cuba by the West African slaves forced to work on the colonial Spaniards' sugar plantations. Today, an estimated 70 per cent of Cubans practice the Orisha religion, which is sometimes referred to as *Santaria*. Tribal Yoruba gods are worshipped in the guise of Christian saints. Orisha *babalaos*, or *spiritual healers, far outshine Catholic priests,* in performing miraculous cures and hold sway among the poor. The *babalaos'* standing in rural communities and poorer urban areas has increased in tandem with the tightening of the American embargo and the weakening of the once exemplary health service system. Castro understands that stifling religious fervour will not do. The Pontiff's reception typifies Cuba's new pragmatism. Castro recently raised the status of Orisha to an official religion, and *babalaos'* are now sent officially for training in Africa and Brazil. Across the Straits of Florida, a 1993 US Supreme Court decision to legalise Orisha rituals was passed primarily because of pressure from an ever-increasing number of immigrant Cubans and Haitians in Florida and other US states. The parallels between Cuba and the US end there.

The pontiff's visit to the last bastion of Marxist-Leninism comes at a time when Cuba stands at a crossroads. It is opening up to Western Europe and Latin America, but it is being hampered in its efforts by the United States. Castro has pragmatically turned a blind eye to the adoption of certain capitalist ways in Cuba, but the Caribbean island nation's efforts to institute economic reform are being curtailed by America's economic embargo on Cuba. His historic visit to China in November 1996, was partly regarded as an opportunity for Cuba to learn first hand from China's experience with "market so*cialism*".

To his credit, the Pope publicly condemned the US economic embargo imposed on Cuba which prohibits American companies and their Third World subsidiaries from trading with Cuba. The Helms-Burton Law, as the American embargo is called, was further intensified in October 1992, when the so-called "Cuban Democracy Act", also known as the Toricelli Law, prohibited foreign carriers heading for Cuba to cross US waterways.

Cuba cannot be compared to the US, but it can draw on the experience of other countries that had command economies, like Russia and China. Castro cannot seriously be expected to be both Lenin and Gorbachev and every Soviet leader in between. Receiving the Pope at the Palace of the Revolution, Castro signalled his willingness to open up his island nation to different ideas. The two leaders were at loggerheads over the relevance of Marxism-Leninism. But, they have similar views on social issues. They also held different views on individual rights in Cuba. The Pope singled out the "lack of freedom of expression", as Cuba's main shortcoming. Castro gracefully endured harsh papal criticism and even deliberately employed biblical language in his exchanges with the Pope, describing Cuba as a David fighting the American Goliath. Castro promised to study the Pope's appeal for the release of alleged political prisoners.

The Pope was at his best — an old-fashioned leader searching for old-fashioned ways to arouse the masses. He is against abortion, divorce, extra-marital affairs, and homosexuality. Communism, Catholicism and capitalism were the main themes in his measured criticism of his hosts — Cuba's Communist leaders headed by 71-year-old Fidel Castro. The sanctity of the marriage and the family featured prominently in the Pontiff's sermons. He pointed an accusing finger at the degeneration of family values for the rise in social ills. Castro, who never got married but sired several children out of wedlock smiled obligingly. The two aging icons got on famously — "like a house on fire," one cynical reporter said tongue in cheek.

Castro met the Pope in a conservative suit rather than his trademark military fatigues. Pope John Paul II spoke at the historic Revolution Square, an estimated half a million people turned up for the open air mass. The crowd interrupted the pontiff two dozen times in spontaneous bouts of applause. He was their "friend," the Pope assured his Cuban hosts. But, what does that practically mean? In any case, Castro paid the compliment with a passionate defense of the 40-year-old Cuban Revolution, and asked the Pope to speak out against the evils of capitalism and America's Cuban embargo.

The Pope was given a platform to pontificate. But, the question is how to translate intensions into specifics, particalarly when the Pope's initiatives may be unacceptable to the Cuban government. To his credit, the Pope hinted that he *cannot blame a singular* incompetence of Communists for the Caribbean islands economic woes. The Pope said that Cuba must end its international isolation. But Cuba is actually the least isolated of all the so-called "rogue states" on America's black-list. The Pope did confess that "capitalism and neo-liberalism" tends to "enrich a few nations to the detriment of others."

At an open air mass which threatened to become a mass political rally, the Pope called for a free and independent Cuba. He urged the Cuban people to reject both Marxism and capitalism. The Pope made a distinction between Communism and patriotism — a distinction that is somewhat blurred in Castro's Cuba. Criticising both communism and *capitalism*, the Pope offered no credible alternative. Nor, did he say which was the lesser evil.

His message sounded very familiar — indeed very much like that of the Islamists. Except, of course, that the shrewd pontiff, shied away from actually pronouncing Roman Catholicism to be the solution to all the world's ills.

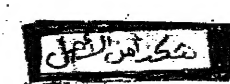
The Pope's goodwill messages cannot change Third World realities. He has yet to charter a middle way between capitalism and communism. How on earth can the world reject both communism and capitalism? The trigger for financial crisis in East Asia, as in Mexico in 1994, was external. The root cause being huge short-term dollar-dominated debt payments and the fact that, barring the International Monetary Fund's belated attempt to arrest the financial crisis, Western banks and investors refused to extend new credit to the newly-industrialised "tigers" whose status reverted overnight back to Third World countries. East Asia's debtor corporations did not have enough dollars to payoff those holding a chit. The bursting bubble of the East Asian economic miracle awakened many post-Cold War Third World people to the pitfalls of runaway capitalism. Market forces control everything, but capitalism, Asian-style, is no longer a particularly attractive alternative for Cubans.

Times are hard everywhere — as much in capitalist East Asia as in communist Cuba. As we race towards the threshold of the 21st century, religion profoundly influences daily life everywhere. We are all sometimes overcome by very strong feelings for individuals even though they are extremely remote from everyday life. We experience very powerful private moments which some call religious experiences. Religion has always had powerful social, political and economic ramifications. So, is the Pope Catholic?



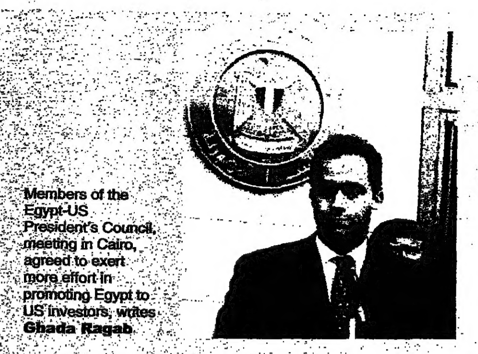








Making US business in Egypt


Members of the Egypt-US President's Council, meeting in Cairo, agreed to exert more effort in promoting Egypt to US investors, writes **Ghada Ragab**

The Egypt-US President's Council, an advisory body of business executives from both sides, last Monday agreed to sponsor a move to increase US awareness of the Egyptian economy and investment opportunities.

Gamal Mubarak, the spokesman for the Egyptian side, speaking about the meeting in Cairo, said the move includes a series of conferences, sectoral meetings and company-to-company meetings to establish links with industrial and trading partners.

"We hope to capitalise on the positive changes and progress made in the Egyptian economy," Mubarak said.

"The target now is to establish a mechanism to spread the word... about the business environment in Egypt, and make sure that this progress is translated into direct foreign investment," he said.

To set the agenda for last Monday's meetings, the Egyptian side met with President Hosni Mubarak, while the US side met with US Vice-President Al Gore.

During the meeting, Mubarak outlined his vision of the council's role, which included encouraging continued liberalisation of the economy, especially through privatisation; the improvement of the regulatory framework for investments; capitalising on progress in reform to attract US direct investment and technology transfer and promoting exports.

The Council, established in 1995 to advise President Hosni Mubarak and US President Bill Clinton on business and policy issues, has been severely criticised by Egyptian experts for failing to bring about concrete improvements in Egyptian-US relations.

But its members have defended its achievements, arguing that its role is only to provide advice and not to carry out specific projects.

The US side was represented by its 6-member executive committee, headed by Jack Tyman, president of Westinghouse Electrical Systems. The Egyptian side was headed by businessman Ibrahim Kamel, chairman of Kato Aromatic.

During the meetings Monday, the council focused on generating additional investment inflows to sectors with comparative advantage in the Egyptian economy, establishing mechanisms for the transfer of managerial know-how, developing human resources, encouraging further policy reforms conducive to investment and developing new business opportunities between the two countries.

More specifically, the council discussed bilateral cooperation in the field of agriculture and related technology, particularly in newly-reclaimed lands and in the field of information technology, telecommunications, electronics, biotechnology and software development, said Tyman.

"The US has a serious shortage of software engineers. We look to other countries and have already started up software factories," he said. "Egypt is an obvious place to develop these kinds of opportunities."

The council also agreed to keep the issue of a free trade agreement (FTA) on its agenda, and to host a conference in the US, which will be attended by key congressional figures "to try and explain the two-way advantage of a FTA."

"The council believes that Egypt is one of the best places in the world for investment," said Tyman. "The flow of capital into the Egyptian stock market is very positive. The foreign investment community has given Egypt very high ratings."

Also on the Council's the agenda was the Mubarak Professional Development Initiative, which aims to make use of American expertise in management and productions. This project is already in progress, and has 68 Egyptian interns working in US companies.

The Council also followed up on progress made in boosting cooperation in the field of small industries. Since the Council last met in March 1997, the Social Fund for Development and the US Small Business Administration began working together on ways to transfer know-how and technical assistance to Egypt.

Left applauds new commerce draft

Egypt's commercial law is being updated at last to keep pace with changes on the world scene

After 115 years of stasis, the country's commercial law is finally being revised in the form of a 772-article piece of legislation aimed at bringing transactions and legislation in line with the latest developments in the global economic arena, reports **Gamal Essam El-Din.**

Debates on the draft law began last week in the People's Assembly, with Justice Minister Farouk Seif El-Nasr stressing that the new commercial law is part of the government's efforts to bring about legislative reform that parallels the structural adjustment and economic reform programme launched in 1991.

"This law may be just what the country needs to push along its economic reform programme," said Seif El-Nasr, adding that it also falls in line with the precepts of Islamic *Shari'a* and has already received the Sheikh of Al-Azhar's stamp of approval.

The draft law seeks to simplify commercial practices, and codify them into one law that can withstand the pressures and challenges of economic developments that change on a daily basis.

The draft law will also regulate daily commercial and banking activities and seek to combat illegal competition, through five different chapters in the legislation.

The first chapter deals with commercial practices in general, while the second regulates commercial contracts and commitments, explained Seif El-Nasr. The third and fourth chapters regulate banking operations and the use of commercial documents, while the fifth is devoted to devising new bankruptcy procedures and measures, such as providing special judges who will not only settle bankruptcy disputes, but also regulate commercial bankruptcy measures.

"The bill upgrades all of these outdated commercial practices and transactions, as well as ways of settling commercial disputes," he said. "For example, there are 67 articles in the bill devoted to upgrading cheque-based operations."

These measures encourage the use of cheques "as the main commercial tool in Egyptian economic life," he said.

"The proposed law increases penalties for cheque fraud to one year in prison and a maximum fine of LE10,000," elaborated Seif El-Nasr. Cheques are currently not accepted by the vast majority of retail outlets and small businesses in Egypt.

The new bill also serves as an umbrella legislation for a wide variety of commercial and professional activities, foremost among which are the supply of goods and services, industrial activities, overland and sea freight, and brokerage, insurance and banking activities, said Mohamed Moussa, chairman of the parliament's Legislative and Constitutional Committee.

The bill defines as commercial activity fields such as the media, commercial uses of computer software, mining operations, livestock breeding, and importing and exporting products, he said.

In addition, the new legislation "also covers new areas such as technology transfer, restoration works and air and marine transport projects," said Moussa.

Unlike other issues brought before parliament, the draft law won unanimous praise from opposition and majority legislators alike.

Khaled Mohieddin, leader of the leftist Tagammu Party, declared the draft law "a great achievement", but noted that the party has some reservations over a few of the articles dealing with cheques.

The Nasserite Party also applauded the bill, with its only representative in parliament, Sameh Ashour, noting that it "represents a basic necessity for keeping abreast of modern economic changes."

Suez Canal Authority curtailed

Opposition MPs as well as the head of the Suez Canal Authority blasted the government for attempting to curtail the authority's independence, but parliament passed the restrictive amendments anyway

In a move that strips the Suez Canal Authority (SCA) of much of its high-level decision-making autonomy, the People's Assembly last week passed a new law that places control of the authority in the hands of the prime minister, reports **Gamal Essam El-Din.**

The new law, which is an amendment to the Suez Canal Law 242 of 1971, states in article two that the SCA will be no longer an independent authority, but will now fall under the purview of the prime minister's office.

Article three of the revised law stipulates that the implementation of any future decision by the SCA's board on ship traffic through the canal must first be approved by the prime minister himself. The SCA will be also stripped of the right to confiscate property in the Suez Canal area.

The law was not well received by opposition MPs and the SCA's chairman, Ahmed Fadel, who described the amendments as unjustified and said that they rob the SCA's board of the flexibility and speed required to hold extraordinary meetings or take urgent action.

Using history as the basis of his argument, Fadel said that the government made a sweeping announcement in 1957 that the SCA would be an autonomous body. The statement came one year after the canal was nationalised, sparking war in the region.

In light of this declaration by the government some 41 years ago, the new amendments are a violation of the signed documents which were entered into official United Nations records.

Moreover, the amendments also run counter to the government's current policy of granting the public sector complete administrative autonomy, Fadel said.

Fadel, who submitted a memorandum listing his objections to the amended articles, said that "the new law will lead to curtailing the powers of Egyptians in running the canal they fought hard to regain."

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri's response was brief and swift. The decision to modify the law came about as a result of a recent SCA decision to reduce ship traffic fees, which El-Ganzouri had criticised as "dispensing with state revenue." It was Fadel who took the decision.

But opposition MPs were as quick with their come-backs. El-Badri Farghali, a leftist MP from the Suez Canal city of Port Said, argued that El-Ganzouri's decision will undermine the stability of the SCA.

The amendments "come at a time when the SCA faces cut-throat competition from maritime routes such as Ashdod and Eilat in Israel, and the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa," said Farghali.

"The SCA's decision to reduce fees was necessary in order to face up to this competition and lure ships," he said.

Recent statistics reveal that SCA revenues dropped from $1.849 billion in 1996 to $1.783 billion in 1997.

Ramadan Abul-Hassan, an MP from the city of Suez, also said that the SCA's independence should be guaranteed "to ensure its ability to take urgent decisions during critical times", such as when ships carrying nuclear weapons pass through the canal.

El-Ganzouri, in response, argued that the amendment does not mean that the prime minister will take every decision.

"A distinction will be made between decisions which require prior approval by the prime minister and other decisions to be taken by the SCA's chairman," he said.

Still, other MPs refused to buy that explanation and hinted at conspiracy theories. Sameh Ashour, a Nasserist MP, said that the amendments "stir up suspicions".

"It is the first step towards privatising the Suez Canal," he said.

MPs charge 'cronies' collar US aid

A month of fasting did little to temper parliamentary debate over the use and disbursement of US aid grants, reports Gamal Essam El-Din

Mention US aid in parliament and tempers are sure to flare as they did last week when opposition MPs used an $850 million US grant, which they claimed catered to a privileged few, to lash out at the American aid programme as a whole.

MPs, charging "favouritism" in the disbursement of US grant money, demanded parliamentary approval to have the Central Auditing Agency look over the $850 million Commodity Import Programme (CIP), a United States Agency for International Development-funded project launched in 1995 which provides credit facilities for the import of US-manufactured machinery and equipment.

Opposition legislators said that the CIP grant was used by the US to flood Egyptian markets with low-quality American goods.

USAID grants are generally used to further the interests of a select few businessmen with close ties to the US, charged Yassin Serageddin, the Wafd Party's leader in parliament, singling out members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt in particular.

"I feel dissatisfied with these grants which usually discriminate in favour of some businessmen known for their crony contacts with the US," he said.

The grant also targets 13 out of Egypt's 60 commercial banks, added Khaled Mahmoud, an independent MP.

"This grant is used by these banks not only to achieve profits by imposing a high interest rate on grant proceeds loaned out to the private sector, but also to keep the grant money for their clients only," said Mahmoud.

The CIP is supposed to boost the Egyptian private sector's role in the country's economic development, but has been the target of parliamentary criticism on grounds that the funds have been misdirected, distributed with bias or used by the US to promote the export interests of its corporations.

"Could we use the proceeds of this grant to buy the same kind of advanced US weapons and technology that are sold to Israel," asked the Nasserist Party's Sameh Ashour cynically.

In addition to US development aid, Egypt also receives $1.3 billion in US military aid, much of which is earmarked for the purchase of weapons and arms technology.

Finance and trade ministers Mohieddin El-Gharib and Ahmed Guweili both vehemently denied that the grant was distributed unfairly.

According to El-Gharib, the CIP assists both Egypt's private sector and American companies exporting to Egypt.

"The grant serves both parties," said El-Gharib. But about 50 per cent of the grants proceeds are devoted to the import of "capital goods" demanded by the Egyptian market. The remaining 50 per cent is used to import raw materials and production inputs, he said.

Tackling the issue of bias in grant distribution, El-Gharib pointed out that "the People's Assembly could request that banks provide it with the names of the grant recipients," to prove that claims of bias were unfounded.

Trade Minister Guweili added that the grant's proceeds are allocated to any private sector project "so long as it meets the conditions of the grant."

Their statements, however, did little to stifle the ire of critics. Zakaria Azmi, the president's chief of staff stated that "the Assembly had been denied any information on how the first and second additions to the grant were used."

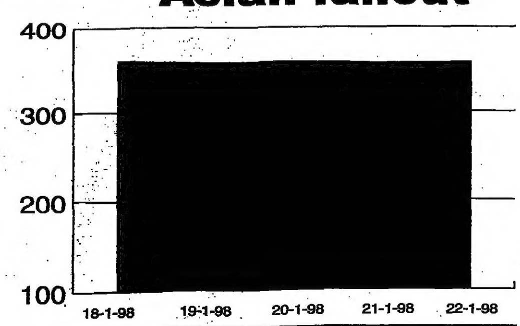
He also said that the government had failed to fulfil a pledge by Parliamentary Minister Kamal El-Shazli, who promised that a detailed statement on the disbursement of USAID grants would be made available by November 1997.

"This is an essential part of the Assembly's supervisory responsibility," he said. "It is disappointing that we have not yet been given any statements about how these grants are used."

These grants "provoke MPs because the donor always stipulates that disbursement should not be conditional on the approval of the Assembly," added Abdel-Ahad Gamaleddin, chairman of the parliament's Arab Affairs Committee.

Market report

Asian fallout



THE THIRD time may be the charm, but not for the capital market, which suffered a loss for the third week in a row. The General Market Index slipped by 1.46 points to close at 357.61 for the week ending 22 January. Analysts attributed the decline to the crash in the Southeast Asian markets. Most investors, fearing a repeat performance in other emerging markets, began to divest some of their holdings.

But it was not all a scene of doom and gloom as those who kept their faith, and their money, in the market, landed proposed amendments to the capital market law. The amendments deal with regulations on the operations of both brokerage and portfolio management companies, and revise the criteria of information published on trading, the aim being to increase data availability.

On the trading floor, the Engineering and Industrial Projects Company captured the limelight, with trading of its shares totaling LE26.49 or 13.04 per cent of total market activity. EIPC's moment of glory came about largely because it announced that its first quarter profits had quadrupled. The value of the stock, however, dropped from LE58.96 to LE58.67 as a result of excessive trading.

Shares of the General Paper Production Company (Rakta) registered a 14.17 per cent increase in value, with its stock closing at LE13.7.

In all, the share value of 39 companies increased, 71 decreased and 33 remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Rédacteur en Chef Exécutif
Mohamed Salmawy

Président et Rédacteur en Chef
Ibrahim Nafie

India celebrates its Republic Day

A message from the Egyptian ambassador to India

Jaylan Allam

INDIA celebrates its 48th anniversary of the founding of the Republic on 26 January 1998. This occasion leads us to meditate on Egyptian-Indian relations and the similarity of both countries' historic circumstances, and their strive against colonisation. After both countries obtained their independence, they dedicated their efforts to establish valuable principles that call for justice, equality, freedom, peace, and development.

It was only natural that the viewpoints of both countries' leadership meet and have one aim based on the same principles, since Egypt and India each has a long history of their ancient civilisations, and they faced similar situations after the second world war with the formation of a bi-polar world. Thus Egypt and India played a great role leading Third World countries when they announced the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement.

This occasion also makes us look into the future and how the two leading Third World countries should have a mutually planned stance, based on their common history, to face the challenges of the new world that is being transformed under globalisation, with all its cultural, political, economic, and social repercussions.

Both Egypt and India realise the importance of reviving their exceptionally strong relations for their welfare and the welfare of the Third World countries, aimed at interacting with the current world order, in order to form a new world order with many poles of strength. In such a new world, Third World countries will find a place for themselves and their people under the sun. Developing the economy has now become the top priority in the policies of both countries as they started undergoing economic reform since 1991 and succeeded in achieving positive results. From 1995-97 both countries signed different agreements and protocols in fields that encourage and protect new investments, in addition to fields related to scientific research, and technological development, as well as fields that encourage development of trade between both countries. In addition, agreements were made concerning security, combating narcotics; between the foreign ministries; and in the field of cultural affairs. These agreements and protocols provide a sound base for both countries' relations as we approach the 21st century.

There is no doubt that the crowning event in the historical relations between the two countries will be the anticipated visit of President Hosni Mubarak to India during the current year. It is a visit which will set the tone for Egyptian-Indian relations for the forthcoming century as the developing nations work together towards prosperity, progress, and comfort.

A message from the Indian ambassador to Egypt

Kanwal Sibal

TODAY is the 48th anniversary of the founding of the Indian Republic. It is on this day in 1950 that India adopted its Constitution which is the bedrock of its democracy and secularism. Our Constitution embodies the profound vision and the lofty principles that animated the great leaders of India's freedom struggle like Mahatma Ghandi and Jawaharal Nehru. They foresaw that India's multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society could be best governed and the legitimate interests of all groups best protected if the people of India enjoyed the widest possible freedoms and the State was not associated with any religion. After long years of repressive foreign rule, the leaders of India wanted to guarantee to their people all fundamental rights and freedoms protected by an independent judiciary and the rule of law.

Our mutual trade is growing and Indian firms have begun to increasingly invest in Egypt, which is fast becoming a credible growing market. The exclusive Indian exhibition at the Cairo International Conference Centre from 15-19 April this year will be another step forward in our efforts to strengthen our trade ties.

India enjoys much goodwill amongst the Egyptians. Apart from political understanding and cultural affinities that exist, the Egyptian press has played a positive role in nurturing friendly sentiments towards India. I sincerely thank the contribution made by *Al-Ahram* to the promotion of Indo-Egyptian ties of friendship and cooperation.

From New Delhi:
Mohamed Youssef Habib

San Exports for pipes and tubes

SAN EXPORTS, division of Pipes and Tubes, have fast gained confidence of importers all over the world. In an intensively competitive international market of multibranded products, they have emerged out meritorious.

Based in Mumbai (India), the business capital of India, San Exports have an expert team of qualified engineers well experienced in the piping industry. They maintain stringent quality standards with efficient and prompt response to calls.

They deal in GI ERW, MS Black, Seamless and ERW pipes and tubes with forged and commercial fittings in a wiude variety of sizes, in addition to copper tubing and stainless steel fittings conforming to international standards.

The architects of this esteemed organisation are Mr N M Goyal and Mr Ashish N Goyal. They guide a team of expert technicians well versed in the latest developments in the piping industry. San Exports provided prompt and efficient after-sales facilities, which is an integral part of a service-oriented organisation.

In short, San Exports is for Pipes and Tubes.

Samtel: the perfect picture

THE REAL measure of success is a satisfied customer. Samtel's customers most certainly bring this to life.

Leading Indian TV manufacturers like BPL, Onida, Videocom and Philips, in addition to its International customers, depend on Samtel Tubes for the perfect picture.

At Samtel, we believe that our customers are our partners in progress, and it is their satisfaction that defines our success. But what constitutes this success? Quality and service. And it is this that gives Samtel the edge.

Company-wide movements have created a quality structure geared to one specific goal — total customer satisfaction. Customer service with its roots spread deep within the Group, ensures high standards are maintained at every given stage. The quality of service that reaches the external customer service begins with the quality of service that people and functions within Samtel give each other.

It is this action that has today made Samtel, a picture tube technologist to reckon with.

Excellence can never be restricted. Today, the Samtel name is heard on distant shores.

Long before globalisation and exports became the buzzwords that they are, Samtel was already exporting, beginning with an order for 4,000 tubes to Hong Kong in 1987.

With more that two million tubes every year, it is now the largest exporter of tubes from India to the USA, Europe, the Far East, Africa and the Middle East. And to names like Philips, Grundig, Sharp, Motorola, Thomson, Burle, Omnivision, National — to mention just a few.

This growing awareness of Samtel's international class technology has taken its annual export turnover to over Rs. 900 Million. But most gratifying of all is the fact that the 'Made in India' label now stands for quality picture tubes worldwide.

And as Samtel expands, its horizons widen. No longer will it be looking at a few countries. It has now set its eyes on the globe.

SBS Overseas

SBS OVERSEAS are importers and exporters of repute who have in a few years increased their turnover at a rapid pace with professionally managed international trading. We are an upcoming international business organisation (IBO) with the most modern facilities available for international electronic trading.

SBS Overseas specialised in the import and export of agricultural products, food and dairy products, spices, tea, coffee and tobacco, apart form being one of the larger exporters of pharmaceuticals, patent medicines, medical disposables and condoms.

We have kept the Middle East and Africa as our most focused territory for our international trading, and look forward towards using our expertise in furthering the requirements of governments and companies for bulk requirements and the development of trade in all countries of the Middle East and Africa. This special thrust is being made in the 50th year of India's independence when we as a company feel that the development of trade will enhance friendly relations with all, *inshallah*.

Addya at a glance


S N Addya

S C ADDYA ZMG Co. (p) Ltd began its activities in 1983, earning great success in providing fish-hooks of the highest calibre and at low cost to its customers .

As the company gained success in the sale of fish-hooks and fishing equipment, demand for local imports gradually decreased.

Today, Addya exports fish-hooks to the United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Tanzania, Sudan and Somalia. Addya Co, owned by S N Addya, is constantly seeking new markets for its high quality products offered at competitive prices in all corners of the world.

Orient fans: a leading brand of ceiling fans

THE YEAR 1912 saw the establishment of the very first industry in the field of consumer durables in India — the electric fan industry. From its humble beginnings it grew into a flourishing industry which spawned many a brand. One such brand, conceived in the pre-World War II era, 'Orient', belongs to the Birla Group of Industries, one of the largest industrial houses in Asia and the largest ceiling fan manufacturers of India. Orient has also imparted technological know-how for setting up assembly plants in countries like Nigeria, the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Sultanate of Oman.

Nothing succeeds like success

Sharma

SHARMA Chemical Works is engaged in the business of manufacturing ayurvedic oil under the trade name Banphool since 1982.

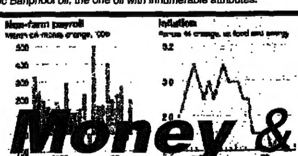
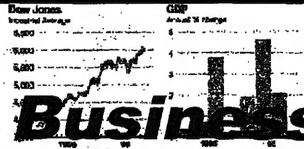
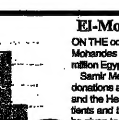
Ayurvedic Banphool oil is the only answer to healthy skin, beautiful hair, cool scalp, headache and sound sleep. For curing skin disease, relieving bodyache, keeping the blood pressure in check, preventing sunstroke, relaxing ear pain and building blood stamina, there is the one and only ayurvedic Banphool oil, the one oil with innumerable attributes.

Workers' city in 6th of October

THE 6th October City Investor's Association and the Ministry of Housing and New Communities are studying plans to construct a new residential city for workers over an area of 500 feddans.

Mohamed Hussein Guneidi, head of the Association, said the new city will solve the problems of over 50 thousand workers who commute daily from Cairo to 6th of October City.

Planning for the infrastructure of the new city is currently underway, especially in light of the changes to the area's road and transportation network, which includes the completion of the 26 July Highway and the construction of a commuter train to Cairo.

El-Mohandes Insurance makes donation

ON THE occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, board members of El-Mohandes Insurance Company have decided to donate a quarter of a million Egyptian pounds to charity.

Samir Metwalli, chairman of the board of the company, said, "These donations are earmarked for Kasr El-Aini Hospital, the Cancer Institute, and the Heart Disease Institute, to contribute in the treatment of the patients and to buy modern clinical devices. Some of the money will also be given to associations working with orphans. This is to keep the company's social role alongside its economic role in providing insurance protection for the citizens, and to contribute in boosting development activities in the country."

Americana: A participating sponsor of the IAA Congress to convene in Cairo this May

IN VIEW of the importance of the 36th International Advertising Association Congress, held under the patronage of President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak and which will convene for the first time in a Middle Eastern country, Mr Nasr El-Kharafi, head of the Americana Group of companies, signed an agreement for Americana to be a participating sponsor of the 36th IAA Congress. Signing the sponsorship agreement was Mr Hassan Hamdi, head of the Congress' Organising Committee, and Mr Ibrahim El-Alfi, general manager of Americana and deputy member of the board. The Congress will convene its first session on 10 May, while Mrs Suzanne Mubarak will preside over the closing session. The Congress will receive attendees from over 90 countries, a large number being from international advertising and media organisations. Dr Butros Ghali will participate as keynote speaker of the Congress.

Americana's willingness to participate in this Congress is due to the international importance of the Congress, as well as the publicity, and economic and tourism gains that Egypt stands to make.

Americana began its activities 35 years ago. The volume of its work and efforts flourished until its investments reached billions of Egyptian pounds. Americana plays a positive and active role in developing the economies of Middle Eastern countries, among them Egypt, in the area of foodstuffs and international restaurants. Coupled with this continuous success was the founding of numerous companies in the field of foodstuff production, in addition to the marketing of numerous international products such as Cadbury chocolates, the preferred brand of chocolate in the world.

Among the most important products of Americana is Farm Frites potatoes; Heinz ketchup and tomato sauce; Beefy meat products and Koki chicken products. This is in addition to Americana Cakes, California Garden products, and Gulfa mineral water.


Ibrahim El-Alfi

Americana has introduced first time to the Middle East some 350 restaurant franchises, the likes of which have never been seen before in the region, including KFC, Chicken Tikka, Pizza Hut, TGI Fridays, Baskin-Robbins, Fish Market, Al-Samadi Patissire, all of which have provided no less that 20 thousand employment opportunities. Americana also set a unique example by opening special branches of restaurants that employ only deaf and mute employees, in places such as Dokki and Alexandria and in some of the Gulf states. The success of this experiment has exceeded all expectations.

Americana wishes to make Egypt its main centre for developing human resources, and has established the largest training centre for its employees in the Middle East, using the most advanced technology and techniques in the field.

For over 35 years, Americana has maintained a leading position in the region. Americana derives its continued success from its ever-willingness to participate in developing the Egyptian economy. Likewise, Americana has won the applause of Arabs and Egyptians everywhere and from all who taste Americana's products.

Thus, Americana's participation in this Congress reflects its confidence in the Egyptian economy, as the success of the Congress will earn Egypt a good reputation and will attract capital from all corners of the world.

National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Index from 15-22 January 1998

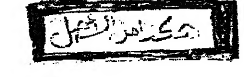
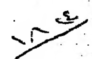
CLOSING ON 22/1/98 345.18 POINTS

The NBE Index has decreased by 4.85 points to register 345.18 points for the week ending 22/1/1998 against 350.03 points for the previous week ending 15/1/1998.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Change %
Alexandria Iron and Steel Co.	+5.0
Credit Int. d'Egypte	+3.7
Upper Egypt Flour Mills	+2.5
Memphis Pharmaceutical	+1.8

Company	Change %
Al-Ama Silos and Storage Co.	-19.1
Paints and Chemical Industries (PACHIN)	-9.4
South Cairo & Giza Flour Mills	-7.9
EPICO	-4.9

هكذا من الأصل

Compromise for deterrence

Conventional and nuclear capabilities mean little when it comes to peace, writes Amin Hewedy. At best, we can hope for a stability based on compromise

In 1904, shortly before his death, Theodor Herzl warned of two dangers to Israel: "men of religion and men of war." Having established the state of Israel, he wrote, both groups would attempt to control it, thus leading to the collapse of its secular basis.

If he could see Netanyahu, Herzl would be spinning in his grave. Under pressure from a racist minority, the two main parties are incapable of forming a government which represents the majority. A coalition, described by Shimon Peres as a government of dissidence in which the opinion of the racist minority controls the colonialist majority, has been the inevitable result. Yet it is the military-industrial complex that actually rules.

The combined power of the Arab states far exceeds that of Israel, except in the military field. Yet Israel has imposed its strategic objectives on the Arab states. Israel has thus been capable of emphasising the economic benefits of peace, while sidestepping the political means of achieving it.

Clausewitz's assertion that war is the pursuit of politics by other means has been rendered obsolete by the nuclear deterrent, which allows only complete, mutual annihilation. On the regional level, however, it is still possible to resort to force in imposing realities in complete contradiction with the inhabitants' historical rights. Israel is building settlements, roads and bridges — in a word, transforming the landscape and the composition of the population. It imports Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe to inhabit the land, and subsidises them with funds provided by the US.

In order to implement this transformation, Israel draws world attention to other minor hostilities. The tunnel under Al-Aqsa is a good example of this policy. The Arabs focused on it exclusively, precisely as Ariel Sharon, the Israeli minister for infrastructure, was busy changing the geographic and demographic maps. Bulldozers are the ultimate policy-makers: when the time comes for negotiations, there will be nothing to discuss. The Doha summit also sidetracked the Arabs, who should have focused on the peace negotiations, and the implementation of previous agreements.

The Arabs enjoy certain geographical and strategic advantages which would allow them to absorb a first strike before launching a counter-offensive. They also have facilities from which to launch strategic surprise attacks.

Fighting capability, however, is not determined solely by weapons; the army and its leadership also constitute crucial factors. Technology does not guarantee superiority. It is the ability to use it correctly that is the decisive criterion.

If a balance of power prevails, the parties to a conflict are unable to resort to force. If they are compelled to do so, fighting will be restricted to a minimum, and the parties will be far more inclined to settle their differences at the negotiating table. But in the current situation, Israel is able to act as it pleases, while impeding the actions of its enemies. It can impose unjust, incomplete settlements, which reflect its preponderant power, not a balance of interests. Settlements of this sort are short-lived, because they are tolerated only by those who agreed to them. They discount the needs of future generations, and fail to engender any sense of security or safety.

Due to its overwhelming monopoly of military capabilities, Israel is also able to insist on its security needs at the expense of others: Israel, in other words, cares neither for the past nor for the future. Israel, however, uses the deterrence principle as a pretext for the use of force.

The current situation is truly unusual. The Arabs enjoy numerical superiority, but they have no vitality: to use a somewhat overblown metaphor, they are like a dragon without claws or fangs. They have the means to deter aggression, but they lack the will to use them.

The means of deterrence are not as important as the result. A suicide bomber is a powerful deterrent. Determination makes up for deficiency in actual deterrence capabilities. In fact, the inferior party often appears a more credible — and crucial — factor in the deterrence equation. A bomb represents a more immediate deterrent than a nuclear weapon.

Chemical and biological weapons and conventional arsenals are capable of deterring such threats, but stones, Molotov cocktails and suicide bombers are paradoxically far more powerful deterrents than either of these. This is partly because the deterrent used must be appropriate in order to be effective. A students' strike is not dealt with through bombs. Similarly, stone-throwing children are not deterred by tanks.

The second Arab summit, held in Alexandria in 1964, marked the beginning of concerted Arab action against Israel. In addition to other task forces, a group was assigned the responsibility of studying Israel's efforts to divert the Jordan River from its course. An Arab task group for the construction of the necessary embankments was also established. Subsequently, Israel announced it was putting an end to the project. Since then, the Arabs have been able to achieve consensus, but have never been capable of implementing their decisions.

After the 1973 War, Israel chose to interpret any agreements with the Arabs on its own terms. It relied on the fact that the Arabs in general, and Arafat's regime in particular, usually complain for a while, then return to the negotiating table. Its strategy may be summed up as follows.

Israel usually establishes a distinction between political agreements and security measures, which must be in Israel's favour at the time of implementation. When it has shown flexibility in a political agreement, Israel reverses any concessions it may have made within what it calls "safe borders", a policy which often entails the violation of other countries' sovereignty.

Israel carries out changes in topography and demography in order to guarantee its "security", even at the price of the security of other countries. It will agree to a dialogue on geography only after it has established a status quo. It can also create problems in order to enforce a new reality and change the nature of the crisis. The Al-Aqsa tunnel and Jebel Abu Ghneim provide a good example of such measures.

Israel does not consider agreements and time-tables binding. Only security measures determine policy implementation.

The West Bank comes first as far as Israeli security is concerned. It shares borders with Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. On this basis, Iraq [illegible] a reminder that Israel was targeted by Saddam Hussein's Scud missiles. There are 150,000 Israelis in settlements east of the Green Line. If an agreement is to be concluded, it will be necessary to draw up complex plans for the deployment of forces. Moreover, there are Jewish holy sites and water resources in the West Bank, which also controls all roads leading to Palestine [illegible] as well as the three bridges on the Jordan River. For these reasons, Israel may make concessions over Gaza, but the West Bank is a more difficult area.

Given the Arabs' numerical superiority, Israel depends on qualitative dominance: its conventional-plus arsenal, nuclear missiles, insistence on engaging only one of the Arab forces at a time, the superiority of its leadership, the continuous training of its forces, the exclusion of the defence army from domestic security operations, and Israel's dependence on US or UN support.

Israel's main strength, however, lies in its ability to impose "deterrence by conjecture": intimidating its enemies into surmising that it owns a vast arsenal and can wipe them out with a single blow. Since its possession of this arsenal is not actually confirmed, however, it is not subject to arms inspections or other interventions on the part of the international community. This leaves us with several possibilities:

Israel actually possesses several nuclear warheads as well as the means to launch them immediately; it is keeping these warheads in stock, ready to be assembled and launched in a short time; it possesses the know-how, but has not actually manufactured the warheads.

Whatever the case may be, the possibility that Israel is a full-fledged nuclear power must be taken into account; more importantly, however, this possibility arouses sufficient fear in its enemies to keep them quiet.

Israel will not tolerate the same policy on the part of the Arabs; furthermore, it disregards the laws regulating warfare if these laws prevent it from attaining its objectives.

From the above it is clear that only a "balance of deterrence" can achieve a just and lasting peace in the region. This will only be achieved through the power to impose punitive action, and the determination to use that power. The ability to deliver the second blow prevents the enemy from striking.

Several concrete possibilities must be taken into consideration at this juncture. If an alliance is established between Israel, Jordan and Palestine, it may serve as a wedge driven through the Arab world, or a barrier to isolate Syria from the north. On the other hand, it could form a nucleus which will encourage other states to establish cooperation accords. Finally, it could allow Israel to turn its energies to the rest of the region.

The problem of Jerusalem can be resolved, either through the extension of its borders or through joint religious councils; but the issue of sovereignty must not be breached. This phase of the negotiations may extend into the early years of the next century, at which point Israel will withdraw within, not from, the Golan Heights. Joint patrols will be formed in Jebel Al-Sheikh and in the area between the sources of the Jordan River. Concurrently, the main Syrian forces will withdraw to the west of Damascus, and the army will be downsized. The Israeli forces will withdraw from southern Lebanon while securing it from within Israel. This, at least, is Israel's conceptual map at present.

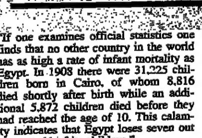
At issue now is the role of the Israeli forces in the implementation of this map on the ground. Will their task be limited to acts of deterrence? Will Israel engage in a small battle in southern Lebanon? Or will it launch a full-scale war against Syria? If the Arabs remain in their cocoon, deterrence alone will suffice to set the bulldozers in motion once more. If the Palestinians content themselves with suicide bombers, stones and the boycott, the PNA will have to choose between complete surrender to Israeli terms and suicide through a new Intifada. If Syria takes an active stance, the result will be a direct conflict, which, so far, all the parties have attempted to avert.

Regional stability will not be realised through nuclear or conventional force. It can, however, be achieved as a "compromise stability", which will fail to satisfy any of the parties fully. It must be based on a balance of interests, not merely a balance of power. If this is to be achieved, the will to employ force and the causes of instability must be eliminated, not merely contained.

The 1947 partition plan is now once again on the table. We need to dwell on this plan, endeavour to understand it better and introduce reasonable modifications capable of satisfying most of the parties' demands. Violence and resentment have brought us back to square one. To revert to the truth, even a partial truth, is better than ignoring it altogether.

The writer is a former minister of defence and chief of General Intelligence.

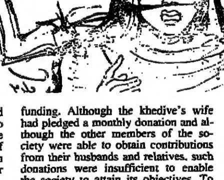
Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life



218 An extremely high child mortality rate in Egypt in the early 20th century prompted the founding of the Mohamed Ali Philanthropic Society under royal auspices. The pioneers were mostly princesses and other women from the aristocratic class. The main aim of the society was to provide health care for children and mothers. The establishment of the society followed increased participation by women in public life. The society initially had financial difficulties but soon overcame them with fund-raising campaigns, including lavish parties and lotteries. *Al-Ahram* strongly supported the society and covered its activities closely. From this coverage **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** puts together this instalment of his *Diwan* series







Refa'a El-Tahtawi

Qasem Amin

"If one examines official statistics one finds that no other country in the world has as high a rate of infant mortality as Egypt. In 1908 there were 31,225 children born in Cairo, of whom 8,816 died shortly after birth while an additional 5,872 children died before they had reached the age of 10. This calamity indicates that Egypt loses seven out of every 11 of its children."

The above, appearing in *Al-Ahram* on 16 February 1910, is an excerpt from an appeal launched by a number of "noble princesses" to establish a charitable society "for the protection of Egyptian children." The announcement of the society, "under the sponsorship of His Royal Highness the Khedive and their royal highnesses the khedive's mother and his wife," marked the beginning of the Mohamed Ali Philanthropic Society which played an important role in Egyptian history, notably in the field of health care.

Al-Ahram perceived this development in the context of the philanthropic activities of the royal family. It is interesting to note, however, that the creation of the Mohamed Ali Philanthropic Society was closely linked to another major development in Egyptian society that spanned the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th the end of the *haramlek* — the place where women were confined in the homes of the aristocratic and middle classes. The emergence of women into public life began in the aristocratic and upper classes, but soon extended to other classes in society, notably the middle agrarian, merchant and professional classes. The primary vehicle for this development was the spread of women's education, beginning with the establishment in 1873 of the first school for girls, also founded by a member of the royal family, the third wife of the Khedive Ismail. With the exception of a brief hiatus after the 1882 British occupation of Egypt, schools for girls increased rapidly over the succeeding decades in keeping with the growing concern for female education. In 1910, the year the Mohamed Ali Society was founded, there were 445 students in the Sanniya and Abbas schools for girls and some 21,000 female students in government-run elementary schools (*kuttab*), an increase of 4,000 in female enrolment over the previous year.

A burgeoning press also played an important role in increasing awareness of the awareness of women's issues. News of the accomplishments and endeavours of educated and working women enhanced the climate for the emergence of women from the harem, a development that was encouraged by prominent writers and intellectuals such as Refa'a El-Tahtawi and Qasem Amin, two prominent advocates of female emancipation.

Against this background, it was not odd that a group composed entirely of women, working independently of male backing, set about to establish a project intended to benefit women and children. The initiative came from Princess Ain Al-Hayat Hanem and the planning committee was composed of "princesses and other women," *Al-Ahram* said.

In addition to members of the ruling family and Turkish aristocracy, the committee included the wives of senior government officials and rural notables, prominent women from the Armenian community and members of the Lebanese-Syrian community. Of the latter was the wife of Bichara Taqla, the founder of *Al-Ahram*, who eventually took over the operations of the newspaper after her husband died. It also included a number of foreign women, particularly French. It was no coincidence, therefore, that the members of the Mohamed Ali Society also included many of the women whose influence extended beyond the realm of charitable endeavours. Among the most notable were Nazli Fadel Hanem who founded a literary salon that brought together some of the most influential figures in Egyptian history, foremost among whom was Saad Zaghlul, and, of course, Hoda Sharawi who led the women's emancipation movement in Egypt.

The founders of the Mohamed Ali Philanthropic Society lost little time in bringing their project to light. On 11 March 1910, less than a month after they announced their intention to create the society, they published the society's charter. Its aims were to "safeguard Egyptian children from disease and to protect mothers from puerperal fever." Toward this end, the society would build hospitals to encourage women to accept free health care and educate mothers on the causes and prevention of disease, child nutrition, and other such scientific and practical matters, under the auspices of female doctors and nurses. It would also publish articles in the newspapers, organise lectures, and distribute literature so as to spread health and sanitary awareness among all classes of the people and arrange for home calls to expectant women.

Al-Ahram praised the forthcoming project. "It will save the lives of thousands and thousands of children who barely open their eyes to this world before disease strikes and deprives the nation, indeed humanity, of their potential." The newspaper also acknowledges the class affiliations of the project's founders when it adds, "The noble women of Egypt have, through these efforts, demonstrated a degree of noble refinement that elevates them to the ranks of men and civilised women of the world. They will extend their education to the women of Egypt and drive away the pains and sorrows from the homes and hearts of the poor."

It was not until January of the following year, however, that the Mohamed Ali society began to put its mission into practice. The nine-month delay was evidently due to lack of funds. *Al-Ahram* reported that the society had organised a lottery to raise money for the society. The drawing was held in Omar Tousoun's palace in Shobra and donors included "the Salonika Tobacco Company which contributed an abundant quantity of its famous cigarettes." The lottery must have been successful, for shortly afterwards, on 16 January 1911, the society opened its first clinic. The opening occasioned a grand inaugural celebration attended by the khedive himself.

Still, in spite of this success, the society continued to face problems of funding. Although the khedive's wife had pledged a monthly donation and although the other members of the society were able to obtain contributions from their husbands and relatives, such donations were insufficient to enable the society to attain its objectives. To raise money, therefore, the society conceived of another venture that would link it to another phenomenon of 20th century Egypt — the rise of the tourist industry.

Indeed, the project was perhaps the first tourist venture in modern Egyptian history. Its purpose, as *Al-Ahram* reports, was "to augment the income of the society by taking advantage of the presence of foreign tourists in Egypt during the winter season and to host for them a unique and unprecedented evening's entertainment with all manner of curiosity and fascination that will bring cheer and contentment to their hearts and minds."

The members of the society mobilised many officials and dignitaries to bring their scheme to light. Prince Omar Tousoun "put his luxurious palace at the disposal of the society for this noble and happy occasion." The palace was to be transformed into "an exhibition in which will be displayed precious jewels and stones and ancient silver and gold brocade and rare shawls inherited by the houses of Egyptian and Ottoman princes. In addition to these splendid objects the likes of which have never been seen in Egyptian soirees, many rooms of the palace will be furnished in the old, traditional styles, offering an accurate representation of the domestic life of the women of those eras."

The organisers sought to attract foreign tourists by recreating an oriental atmosphere and portraying the traditional customs that were gradually disappearing, particularly the life of the harem the confines of which Egyptian women had left behind.

The programme of the gala evening included a mock wedding ceremony "beginning from moment the bride leaves the quarters of her family to the moment she enters her bridal chamber." The ceremony would be followed by a sumptuous wedding feast. Meanwhile, in another room of the palace, Turkish dancers would entertain the guests "with assorted dances that had long served to entertain the beautiful princesses in their royal harems." And in a third room there would be "an Egyptian coffeehouse in which Egyptian women would be wearing traditional costumes that are regretfully no longer seen today. These women will be serving the finest refreshments as the guests are entertained by a musical programme." Finally, one reads that only women would be permitted to attend the gala evening. Tickets cost LE1, a considerable sum at the time.

On 28 February 1910, the first tourist gala in Egyptian history took place.

To the delight of *Al-Ahram* and the organisers of the gala at Tousoun Palace, the soiree was a great success. Perhaps because of this, the officials of the Mohamed Ali Society were encouraged to expand into another domain of social services. Their choice fell on education, and female education in particular.

Until that time, female education rarely extended beyond elementary school. Apart from a handful of graduates from two government-sponsored girls schools, more advanced levels of education were only supplied by missionary schools and a few private girls' schools.

Al-Ahram announced the society's new course of action with the headline, "Female education and the Mohamed Ali Philanthropic Society." The article explained that the society had decided to venture into the field of education after having discovered in their experience of guiding mothers in the upbringing of their children the extent of the sad plight of the poor. "The officials of the society have come to the conclusion that in order to lift these women out of their degradation, they should not only receive guidance but the seeds of knowledge should be sewn among them by providing education to a number of poor girls."

Naturally, *Al-Ahram* welcomed the new venture, but it feared a shortage of finances. "Funding can only be found among patriotic and charitable individuals keen on the elevation and advancement of their nation. The Mohamed Ali Society depends on two sources of income to enable it to achieve its ends: individual charity and government assistance."

In March 1911 the society organised another tourist extravaganza, this time in the Palace of Sidqi Pasha on Falaki Street. Like the first gala, this event created a climate of oriental luxury and featured singing, dancing, a wedding procession, models of traditional Egyptian clothes, a charity market and a lottery for gifts and donations.

Again the fête was a great success. The society acquired sufficient money for the school which opened its doors in February 1912. The school's objectives were "to formulate the moral attributes of young women as regards their person, their honour and their conscience." The curriculum included instruction in the knowledge and practice of the Islamic religion, reading, writing, arithmetic, Arabic language, sewing, washing, ironing, and household cleaning. The new institution was a boarding school "and provides all the young women's needs for food, clothing, reading and sleeping." It accepted students between the ages 8 to 12 "on the condition that they are in good health and that their parents have a clean moral record."

With the school, Mohamed Ali Philanthropic Society not only proved itself instrumental in bringing women into public life but it also set several precedents to be emulated by other Egyptian charity organisations in the field of administration, fund-raising and, last but not least, diversification of activity.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Al-Ahram Weekly
Unforgivable sins

America is hard to read at the best of times. United States President Bill Clinton, braving scandal at home, is poised to order military action against Iraq for Baghdad's refusal to cooperate with the United Nations. By sheer coincidence, a Hollywood film entitled *Wag the Dog*, focusing on a lascivious president, a sex scandal and a phoney war aired on TV to deflect attention from the scandal, was recently released.

Subjugating Iraq, however, is not a matter of rhetoric. Children are dying. The country's future hangs by a thread. One of the most promising of Arab economies is grinding to a halt because it posed a "threat to Israel's national security". The memory of Iraqi Scuds falling on Israeli cities is still fresh in many minds. In Washington and Tel Aviv, Iraqi impertinence is an unforgivable sin.

And so is perjury. Lying to the American people on television is not a criminal offense, but lying under oath is. It all boils down to religion, after all. And religion is what the Middle East, the cradle of monotheism, is essentially about. Terrorists kill tourists in the name of religion. Zionists claim Palestine in the name of religion.

But Mammon also comes into play. Paula Jones is suing for $2 million. Former White House intern Monica Lewinsky will reveal everything "if she gets a promise of immunity," says her lawyer William Ginsburg. Lucianne Goldberg, a literary agent who makes no secret of her anti-Clinton animus, was behind the taping of Lewinsky's "confessions". Arab commentators may have picked up on the names, but this is not the point. Whether or not these key players emerge from the Clinton saga triumphant, the Arabs have nothing to gain from the scandal. Whether Democrat or Republican, pro- or anti-Clinton, it is clear that the Jewish lobby still holds the reins in Washington — and Netanyahu's Israel will be the main beneficiary of Clinton's fall from grace.

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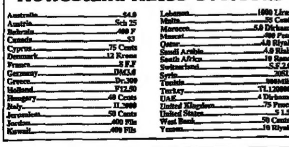
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		Yemen	10 Riyals

A pioneering spirit

The creation of a new delta in the desert is part of an on-going tradition of modernisation that extends back to Mohamed Ali, writes Ibrahim Nafie

Egypt's move into the desert, away from the narrow band of the Nile Valley, will bring about an enormous transformation in the life of this country. It will open up the possibility for comprehensive innovations in agriculture, industry, tourism and public services, and, more far-reaching yet, will bring into play a strong pioneering spirit that will engage the entire nation in the effort to build a new society and to rejuvenate the over-populated, over-burdened Nile Valley.

The many large-scale projects required to achieve these aspirations will extend along two coordinates. The first begins in southern Egypt, where strenuous efforts are being made to bring the waters of the Nile into the Western Desert in order to create a new delta. The second is in the Sinai, which will soon be fed by the waters of the Salam Canal. These two trajectories, spanning Egypt's African and Asian extremities, will ensure a balanced distribution of development activities and permit the optimum use of all of Egypt's resources. The anticipated enhancement *and expansion of our productive* base, and the concomitant demographic, technical and economic transformations, should *equip Egypt to assume an economic density* commensurate with its history.

The incursion into the desert is very much in the spirit of the great national enterprises of Mohamed Ali, the Khedive Ismail and Gamal Abdel-Nasser. These leaders, too, had a vision of engaging the latest advancements in science and technology towards effecting a massive modernisation programme that would effect a qualitative leap forward in Egypt's political, economic, social and intellectual life.

The New Delta project represents just such a projection for the future. It aims to expand Egypt's inhabited surface area to 25 per cent of the total, effecting, in the process, vital demographic, economic, environmental and social benefits. In addition to stimulating investment, the project should bring an additional 3.4 million feddans under cultivation, draw approximately 3 million people away from the Nile Valley and create at least 700,000 jobs.

The project offers a model for the coordination and integration of the public and private sector. While the government will retain its fundamental role in the management of water resources, *it has opened* the doors to the private sector, providing it with the opportunity to rise to this new *challenge. The government will act as* strategic planner, provider of essential infrastructure and architect of the general course of development, the private sector as investor, entrepreneur and innovator.

With the New Delta project, President Hosni Mubarak will go down in history, not only as the initiator of this large-scale scheme to bring prosperity to future generations, but as a visionary with a new philosophy that conforms with the spirit of the age and the demands of the future. Yet, as is frequently the case with any newly conceived endeavour, this project, too, has inspired impassioned controversy and met with both excessive optimism and excessive pessimism. The debate, though, must be tempered by several sobering considerations.

Above all, we must ask ourselves whether Egypt can continue to function *and* grow within the confines of the Nile Valley. Over-population, environmental pollution and the consequent *attrition* on our current urban, industrial and agricultural infrastructure provide an obvious answer.

Compelling realities in the Nile Valley are not the sole factors militating toward the New Delta project. The area itself offers highly promising possibilities, as has been determined by 20 years of intensive study by scientists and technicians. The era is past in which national projects can be instituted for solely political considerations with little heed for the advice of experts.

It is important to mention that many of the concerns that have been voiced in the recent debate over the project can be laid to rest. With regard to finance, for example, it has been estimated that the total cost of constructing the New Delta will come to LE 300 million, 20 per cent of which will be provided by the government and the remainder by Egyptian, Arab and foreign investors. In order to attract this volume of foreign investment, all aspects of the media — television, the press, satellite communications — must be brought into play in order to promote the New Delta project.

As regards fears concerning a possible short fall in water supply, it must be stressed that experts agree that the careful regulation of water consumption, the recycling of waste and drainage water, and modern irrigation methods will ensure the long-term continuity of water resources without infringing current agreements. And as long as Egypt adheres to its share of water as stipulated in its agreement with Sudan, there is no ground whatsoever for assuming the project will see an increase in international tensions.

Regarding the question of agricultural *production*, it has been argued that no commercially valuable crops are suited to the extremes of temperature characteristics of Toshki. It is also argued that the initial cost of bringing a feddan of land under cultivation is LE36,000. While these objections have a certain validity, modern technology should suffice to not only offset costs in the long term, but climatic problems in the short term.

A final objection was that it would be difficult to attract sufficient people to the area. Financial incentives and other concrete benefits, though, should encourage people to participate in the various enterprises that will make up this massive project.

It would do us all well to remember that the goal of moving out of the Nile Valley merits the enthusiasm and collective efforts of all Egyptians — scientists, engineers, architects, researchers, urban planners, farmers, workers — in order that the nation can face the challenges of the 21st century.

Netanyahu and Clinton's scandals

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed argues that although Clinton's sex scandals are not necessarily a conspiracy concocted against him, they have undeniably served Netanyahu's line of implementing a Middle East settlement on his terms exclusively

Although I do not subscribe to conspiracy theories, there are circumstances where the possibility of a conspiracy cannot be totally discounted. A case in point is the convenient timing of the announcement of President Clinton's alleged sexual misconduct with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky, on 21 January, the day after Clinton's meeting with Netanyahu and one day before his meeting with Arafat. It should be remembered that during his meeting with the American president, Netanyahu made absolutely no concessions on his uncompromising stand, as though he knew Clinton had no option but to force Arafat to toe the *Israeli line*.

When asked before leaving for Washington whether he was worried that Clinton might wring concessions from *him*, Netanyahu dismissed the possibility on the grounds, first, that he enjoyed strong support *in Congress and, second, that Clinton's sex* scandals weakened his negotiating clout. Although Clinton made no reference to the disclosures *concerning his private life during* their meeting, Netanyahu volunteered to talk of his own sex scandal, apparently to reassure Clinton *but* possibly *also* as a veiled threat that he was in the know.

Hilary Clinton, who of course has every interest in defending her husband against charges of infidelity, described the attack on him as a "concerted effort to undermine his legitimacy as president, to undo much of what he has been able to accomplish, to attack him personally when he could not be defeated politically". According to most observers, Clinton is the most pro-Israeli president in the history of the United States. While this may be true, it is a fact that Clinton has been less than whole-hearted in backing Netanyahu's line, possibly because he believed the Rabin/Peres line served Israel's interest better.

Indeed, it was a line with which any American president could be comfortable, because not only did it give the impression that the peace process was moving forward, it also managed to secure the two strategic imperatives of American policy simultaneously: strengthening Israel's security and ensuring the stability of the crucial oil region in the Arabian peninsula. Conversely, the Netanyahu line, which purports to consolidate Israel's security, is achieving that objective at the expense of the stability of the oil region. For the fact that it is based on Israel's total antagonism towards all Arab parties, including *Washington's allies*, is not lost on Arab public opinion. However, the sex scandal in which he is presently embroiled could *induce Clinton into softening his position* towards Netanyahu still further in the hope that the latter would intercede on his behalf with *the Republican majority in Congress*.

Today there is a very real danger that Clinton will be impeached as Nixon was after the Watergate scandal, *not* because of *moral* considerations related to sexual misconduct but on charges of perjury and subornation of witnesses. If Clinton is impeached, his Vice-President Al Gore will replace him as president because the charges are directed at Clinton personally, not at his administration or at the Democratic Party he represents. It is no secret that Al Gore is even more pro-Israeli than his boss. Once again we are facing the spectacle of a Likud government falling foul of an American administration; once again it seems the difference will be resolved in favour of the Israelis. There is a strong sense of déjà vu as Clinton teeters on the edge of an abyss; for it was not too long ago that George Bush paid a heavy price for daring to suspend aid to Israel for a few months in punishment for its settlement policy. It was widely believed that this was one of the main reasons he lost his bid for re-election.

There are signs that Israel's supporters in America will spare no effort to ensure that the final stage of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations will proceed according to the Israeli blueprint, not in terms of a historical compromise acceptable to both parties. And though, as I have stated earlier, I am not a partisan of the conspiracy theory, I have no doubt that there is a concerted campaign on the part of the Netanyahu government to mobilise *all* sympathetic forces worldwide, and to exploit those apparently hostile to Israel, to ensure the implementation of "peace" on *Netanyahu's terms*. One *example* is the way Israel is making Switzerland eat humble pie, first with the Swiss banks scandal, more *recently* by *accusing Switzerland* of mistreating Jews during the war. Another is the Garaudy affair, which is being used by pro-Israeli *lobbies to muster support* for Israel. The Arab defence of Garaudy, much of it due to frustration at Israel's uncompromising policies, is being held up as evidence that they support him either for his conversion to Islam or out of anti-Semitism, not of anti-Zionism.

A question worth asking is whether the Arab parties are aware of what is really at stake with Netanyahu's present drive and whether they have given thought to devising a counter-strategy capable of coping with the challenge at a time the Arab-Israeli conflict is reaching its most critical moment of truth.

Movable feasts

By Naguib Mahfouz

I remember the first time my father gave me money — a gold pound — for the feast. Although the glittering coin was worth only 97.5 piastres, while the paper pound was a real pound, worth 100 piastres, I was overjoyed. I've heard, but find it hard to believe, that the golden pound is worth LE300 today. Things have changed so much! My father's gift was certainly not the only one I received on a feast day. Uncles and relatives also gave me gold pounds.

Had I known that the value of the gold pound would rise so, I would have never let go of my gifts. But normally, by the end of the feast, nothing remained in my pocket. During our outings to Al-Hussein on feast days, we pampered ourselves, eating all the goodies which caught our fancy: Turkish delight stuffed with cream, *couscous*, candied apples. The clothes with which we refused to part the night before the feast had the smell of new fabric. I recall an outfit I received when I was ten or twelve. I loved it, and always *associate it with happy times. I kept it* until it disintegrated.

On ordinary days, I normally went with my childhood friend to Cinema Ideal or Cinema Olympia by tram. But one feast day, we decided to treat ourselves to a film *at* Cinema Cosmograph (the present Cosmo). It was frequented by *khawagas* at the time. We even took a horse-driven carriage. But the carriage hit a child, and we spent the rest of the feast day at the police station.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week — Shelving peace

Al-Gomhuria: "It has become clear that at a time when the activities of pro-Zionist groups have reached unprecedented heights, the US role during Netanyahu's tenure has shrunk. Israel has chosen its own path and is no longer interested in the 'peace' it once desired. It is regrettable that years have passed without there being any progress in the Palestinian problem, the core of the Middle East conflict, and it is most likely that the US will 'shelve' the issue for the sake of their blue-eyed boy, Netanyahu."
(Samir Ragab, 23 January)

Akhbar El-Yom: "Netanyahu took with him to the US two victims of Palestinian guerrilla operations to demand blind support for Israel's security which is not really being threatened by anyone. Alas, there is no one to remind him of the three million homeless Palestinian refugees who were expelled by the Israelis or the tens of thousands of Intifada children who were killed or wounded by *Israeli bullets. They say that* Netanyahu's US visit failed to achieve any progress — as was expected — but that Washington will continue to apply pressure *to reach a solution*. What this really means is that the US will continue to support Israel politically, militarily and financially while *asking for more concessions* from the Palestinians and the Arabs."
(Galal Aref, 24 January)

Al-Ahram: "It is clear that the US is out to hound Iraq until it divests it of all its military and economic potential. If this is the case it is imperative that Iraq combat America's hostile intentions by agreeing to enforce all international resolutions. And when the final report is presented to the Security Council, the US will not have a leg to stand on. Yes, we support Iraq in its struggle to lift the siege imposed on it and we call on the Iraqi leadership to enforce all international resolutions for the sake of the Iraqi people and the Arab nation."
(Ihsan Bakr, 25 January)

Rose El-Youssef: "The peace process has ground to a halt because of Netanyahu's policies. The Palestinians have no choice before them but to resist foreign occupation while extending a hand to a just peace. This does not mean they are begging. Resuming their resistance to the occupation and offering more sacrifices will bring peace closer to them and Israelis as well. This is the only way to counter the arrogance and stupidity of Netanyahu and others who *believe that he is too lenient with the Palestinians!*"
(Mahmoud El-Tohamy, 26 January)

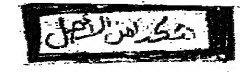
Al-Arabi: "We in the Arab region are accustomed to blaming the US (and previously imperialism), for all our catastrophes. And we have grown used to *blaming* Netanyahu *for ignoring* agreements and slighting the authority of Yasser Arafat. But this is only half the truth. One of the principal causes of *continued US hostility toward* the Arab nation and support for Israel is the divisions within Arab ranks and the inability of Arab governments to respond to challenges. *This also encourages Netanyahu to* proceed with his Zionist policies with arrogance while ignoring any Arab reaction. And the US remains confident that the Arabs have *no will of their own* and must look to it to save them from Netanyahu!"
(Auda Butros Auda, 26 January)

Al-Wafd: "The Clinton-Netanyahu meeting has ended and has achieved absolutely nothing. Did we really expect Clinton to emerge from the meeting to declare that he had succeeded in resuscitating the peace corpse? Or that he had succeeded in convincing his Israeli ally to enforce all agreements signed with the Palestinians? Nothing of the sort has happened. Clinton has been very clear in saying that he had no intention of pressuring his ally into offering concessions to the Palestinians and that he objected to the word 'pressure' in toto. With this in mind Netanyahu emerged from the meeting to declare defiantly that there had been no agreement between him and Clinton."
(Gamal Badawy, 22 January)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



I drew Bill Clinton's face disintegrating into that look of total, puzzled disappointment immortalised by Bob Hope. Surrounded by a group of increasingly vocal alleged paramours, Clinton has lost his golden-boy looks and assurance for the first time. He seems to be holding his breath to the point of explosion: his entire face is gathered with surreal intensity in almost concentric circles around his nose. The stiff hair, long chin and unwieldy nose gain especial prominence when the president stands speechless.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Lewinsky's peace

In the Arab world, the joy usually associated with religious and national celebrations seems very far away. The celebrations are dampened by the overwhelming concerns and problems plaguing the region. Bitterly aware of current circumstances, Arabs and Muslims, on the eve of *Eid Al-Fitr*, are preparing half-heartedly — just going through the motions, it would seem.

On *Laylat Al-Qadr*, the special occasion on which all prayers are said to be answered, the night on which Muslims pray for the liberation of Jerusalem from Israeli occupation, and for the liberation of Arab land from Zionist control and US complicity, President Arafat flew home from Washington empty-handed.

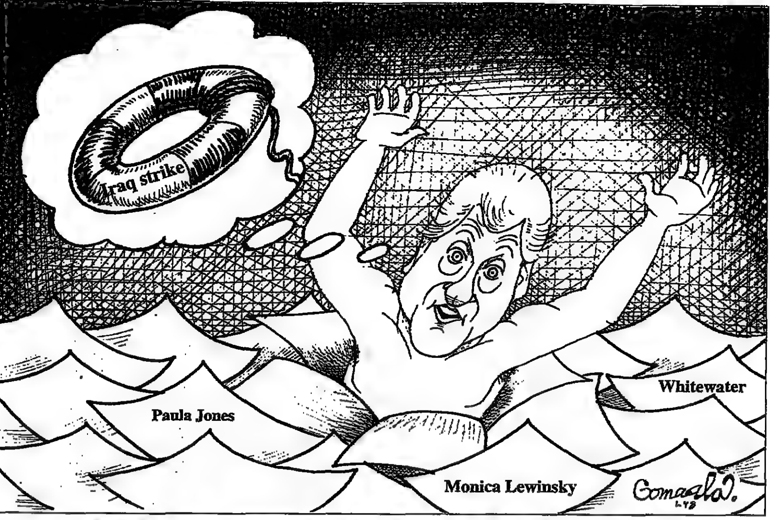
Certain hopelessly optimistic Arabs had believed that, since the US president was personally involved this time, the US administration would certainly have concrete initiatives and suggestions, in addition to good will and a solid determination to pursuade Netanyahu to honour his commitments under the Oslo Accords. These optimists entertained the hope that the peace process could be pushed forwards, even a little. But the scandal in which Clinton is involved as girlfriend after girlfriend reveals his philandering propensities, has dashed any hope that peace is at hand. Arafat was met by a worried and distraught man, waiting for the sentence which will determine his future in the White House. The only thing Clinton remembered after the meetings with Arafat and Netanyahu was Netanyahu's advice on the approach Clinton should adopt to address his personal problem.

The outcome of the visit to Washington seems to suggest that the Middle East issue will be put on hold once again until the US administration sorts out its domestic crisis. Netanyahu's government will certainly seize the delay to accelerate implementation of its plan to bury the peace accords. Yet although Israel has already reacted promptly, declaring that work on the Jebel Abu Ghneim settlement in Jerusalem will be resumed shortly, the Arabs are still hoping against hope. Hoping for what? That the deletion or modification of a few items in the Palestinian Charter (in addition to those already dropped) will finally be the correct answer, and will allow them to score at last. The goalposts, however, have already been moved yet again.

Does this mean that peace in the Middle East is entirely contingent on the outcome of the mess in which Clinton has landed himself? According to certain analysts, escalating threats of a military attack on Iraq indicate the path Clinton will take in a desperate attempt to sweep this crisis under the carpet. A military strike would at least divert attention from the sexual scandals which have damaged his image at home and globally, particularly in view of the media's frenzied attention. The possibility of his losing the presidency to Al Gore seems increasingly likely.

If this happens, not only will the Middle East issue be placed on hold indefinitely, other repercussions affecting the overall situation in the Middle East can be expected as well.

Clearly, if the US decides to launch an attack on Iraq under the pretext of the arms inspection dispute with UNSCOM, the Arab states will oppose it unanimously, as will China, Russia and France. Yet the US may decide that the opinion of the world community does not matter, and that an attack on Baghdad is the only way to prove that Clinton's problems do not affect US foreign policy, nor the US stance on international issues. In the final reckoning, Clinton's crisis could prove beneficial to Israel and Netanyahu, and disastrous to the Middle East and the Arab world in particular.



Soapbox

Easing tensions

Egypt's foreign policy under Mubarak has played a critical role in laying the foundations of Egypt's long sought-after economic progress. An ambitious development policy has been the cornerstone of Egypt's industrial development. The current policy has drawn many lessons from Egypt's history. Egypt today is rapidly joining the club of newly-industrialised countries.

In this context, and in light of the most recent session of the Egyptian-American Presidential Council, Egypt cannot ignore the importance of developing further cooperation with the US. Egypt's stable relations with the US, however, should not compromise regional stability. Egypt must try to convey to Washington the fact that stability cannot be guaranteed without taking into account Arab interests. It is also important for the Americans to understand that Egypt and its rapidly developing industrial capacity, not Israel, is the mainstay of economic development and stability in the Middle East. Cooperation with Egypt is essential for the achievement of a lasting peace, the promotion of regional stability, and fighting terrorism.

In spite of often strained relations between the US and Egypt, especially after the Doha meeting, Washington and Cairo should work together. The Egyptian-American Presidential Council is a forum in which Egypt and America can join forces to ease tensions in the Middle East and develop the full economic potential of the region.

Egypt considers its alliance with America a strategic one. Partnership with the US is of critical importance to the integration of both Egypt and the region in the global economy.



This week's Soapbox speaker is deputy director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Taha Abdel-Alim

The problem is inhumanity

Will the peace process solve the Arabs' problems? No, writes **Edward Said**: this is our own fault, not theirs



Two corners of the Arab world have been very much on my mind these past weeks: Algeria and Lebanon. The former was once synonymous with anticolonial resistance and uncompromising toughness; the latter with openness, diversity and the joy of life. Yet both places have gone through horrendous transformations. The Lebanese civil war lasted for almost twenty years, virtually destroyed society, produced uncounted thousands of dead innocents — mostly killed or massacred because of their religion — and then finally gave birth to a so-called new Lebanon, in which many of the old problems have been swept under a carpet of corruption, frenzied, environmentally destructive building, and deepening economic crisis. The poor are poorer, the rich richer, and all the old politicians and their supporters remain in place on almost entirely confessional grounds.

Algeria has fared just as badly, but in a different, perhaps more agonising way. An ageing political oligarchy held over from the days of anti-French struggle ruled the country for three decades after 1962, in the process bleeding it dry, extinguishing democracy, giving the army the main role in authority and political life. Then in 1992, after the Islamic Salvation Front in effect won the elections, the results of those elections were nullified by the army, and the Islamists — whose politics I have no love for — were declared outlaws, their leaders jailed, their organisations disbanded. Since that time, Algeria has endured wave after wave of massacres, first the killing of intellectuals and artists, then of journalists, most recently literally hundreds of innocent women and children, killed in the most brutal and senseless way. The government's position is that all the killings are being done by renegade members of FIS or the GAI, whereas independent observers such as Amnesty International have accused the government troops of taking part in the killing, or of not doing anything to stop it even though, in several instances, villagers have been slaughtered right next to army posts. To make matters worse, the government has made it almost impossible for foreign journalists to visit Algeria and has turned down several offers of mediation from the Arab League, the European Union, and the United Nations.

Are these two cases unique in the Arab world? Only in degree, not in kind. Those of us who have fought for Palestinian self-determination over the years have been bitterly disappointed in the behaviour of Yasser Arafat's Palestine Authority towards its own citizens. All the human rights groups have commented on the lawlessness, corruption and sheer brutality of PA security men, many of whom paradoxically were victims of Israel's occupation policies. I recall a young man from Gaza, who now worked for one of the security forces in Ramallah, responding to my shocked query about his activities as a spy on, and interrogator of, his fellow students at Birzeit University. He said, "they [the Israelis] tortured me; now it's my turn." Every Arab country practices what we all denounce in Israel, namely physical coercion in prisons, and all around Israel the signs of Arab inhumanity to Arabs are plainly evident. Take as a very simple, even trivial case: people arriving at the airport. Almost without exception they are treated harshly and in a hostile manner by their border police, as if it was assumed that they were criminals and not citizens returning to their homes. Wherever one looks, the signs of an absence of humanity in the powerful towards the weaker and the disadvantaged stands out starkly. Torture, massacres, repression, undemocratic practices: this is what we Arabs have become known for.

It is no use simply blaming Israel or imperialism for this situation, even though they can be blamed in some measure. No one denies that Zionism bears an enormous responsibility for the unhappy fate of the Palestinian people since 1948, but Arabs — collectively and individually — also bear responsibility. This was dramatically apparent in a surprisingly frank and humane programme broadcast on 20 January by ABC television. Apparently the reporter, Steve Lawrence, was sent to Lebanon to report on the country's reconstruction but ended up reporting on the 350,000 (or perhaps more) Palestinians now marooned there without residence permits, unable to work (there are 95 different kinds of jobs which Palestinians are forbidden by law to undertake), unable to travel, poor, destitute, uncared for and generally in a pitiable, not to say dreadful, state. Lawrence focuses on one refugee family in Shatila camp. They are completely without hope, without health, without money. The father tells how, when his one-week-old son was gravely ill, he took the child to a hospital for treatment. That hospital referred him to a charity institution, Hotel Dieu, which had a contract with UNRWA to treat Palestinians. There the poor man was told that he needed to pay $3,000 before the sick baby could be treated. When Lawrence visited the hospital to find out exactly what happened he was first told that the baby was indeed treated free of charge; later, though, a hospital administrator admitted on camera that "it was possible" that the baby had been turned away because he was Palestinian. Desperate, the man took the dying child to Sidon, 50 miles away, but there too he was asked to pay $1,000. Because he started to cry, a hospital worker took pity and told him to leave the baby for treatment but to come back with money the next day. Since he had no choice, the father did what he was told; when he returned the next day, his child had died, but a hospital official refused to give the body back unless he was paid $220. As the disconsolate man and his wife said to Lawrence, "death is better than the sort of life we have to lead here."

The story gets worse. The reporter pays a visit to the prime minister, who says before the cameras that Lebanon is not responsible for the Palestinians; only Israel is. I quote verbatim from the transcript:

Lawrence: Is it fair for the head of the Lebanese government to say it's not our problem?

Prime minister: You know, it depends how you put it. It depends how you put it. We cannot integrate them in the society. We cannot give them the Lebanese nationality. We cannot consider them as Lebanese because they are not and, if we did so, we feel that we are implementing the plan of Israel.

Lawrence: So the refugees are stuck. Even Yasser Arafat appears to have forgotten them. Financial aid from the PLO has been cut. Contributions from wealthy Arab nations, once generous, are next to nothing now.

It is particularly painful to witness such a scene on American television, which is not known for its compassion for Palestinian refugees. Certainly the brief episodes I have described do not begin to approach the exhaustive account of Palestinian life in Lebanon written by Rosemary Sayigh, a truly superb scholar and compassionate human being: her book, entitled *Too Many Enemies*, is available from Zed Books. But the story she tells is pretty much the same as Lawrence's — a story for which the usual excuses and explanations will not do. By the terms of Arab political logic, what the Lebanese prime minister says is unremarkable, perhaps even acceptable. But by the terms of normal human logic, it is profoundly cruel, which is the same attitude to be found in every Arab country with a population of Palestinian refugees who, except in Jordan, are largely treated as non-persons, barely tolerated, officially stigmatised as Palestinian aliens — yes, aliens. It remains for Arab political discourse to explain satisfactorily how it is that the humane treatment of refugees is equivalent to the implementation of Israel's plan: I cannot understand it, and certainly most ordinary human beings not privy to the deep logic of statesmen and politicians cannot either. Is there something particularly sinful or punishable about being a Palestinian refugee? The pity and tragedy of it is that even Palestinian leaders seem not to care about the destitute people they claim to be representing in talks with the World Bank or President Clinton.

Or consider Iraq. Understandably, Saddam Hussein does not want to submit to United States bullying. But he did invade and attempt to obliterate Kuwait, he deliberately provoked a costly and ultimately useless war and, by going on as he has, he has caused enormous suffering for his people, the most innocent of whom (children, the sick and aged) have paid and continue to pay the price of his folly. Is the safeguarding of Iraq's totally ineffective military assets worth such inhumanity, such as callous disregard of human life, even as more presidential palaces are built and "protected"?

There is a coarse inhumanity to our public life that is deeply shocking. We have not paid sufficient attention to the liberal and humanistic education of our young people nor, alas, to the real priorities for our national institutions. The inhumanity of colonialism is replicated, indeed reproduced in our societies two generations after the end of colonialism. The distortions of Zionism have not been rectified by our various national movements, which have glorified raw power, a blind subservience to authority, and a truly frightening hatred of others into practices that are taking us back inexorably into the Middle Ages. In the name of what? Certainly not freedom, since we have far less of it now than we did fifty years ago. In the name of sovereignty and national unity? Certainly not: Arabs are more divided and penetrated than ever. Development and democracy? Of course not. What then? I am afraid to say it but the conclusion is inescapable: in the name of inhumanity. That is our problem: our inability collectively and individually to treat ourselves as human beings deserve to be treated, as citizens whose lives are intrinsically important and valuable. How is the so-called peace process going to help us achieve this basic level of decency and humanity? Obviously it cannot, since the problem begins at home. The sooner we acknowledge that, the better for us.

An ethics of the future

Between the social compact and utopia, we must act "in time", writes **Jerome Binde**

Modern societies suffer from a distorted relationship to time. A major contradiction is at work: on one hand, societies need to project themselves into the future in order to survive and prosper; on the other, they must increasingly act in "real time" and adopt short-term strategies. There is no escape, it seems, from the tyranny of emergency: financial markets, the media, politics (especially come election time) and development aid all march to the same tune. For Dilbert, the cartoon character lost in his cubicle world, the horizon of modern societies has shrunk in time and space. Entire systems of thought and long-term representation seem to have collapsed and, with them, the references to the idea of a common project. Emergency has become "a mode of destruction of time, an active negation of utopia" (Zaki Laidi), one with ominous consequences. "All over the world", remarks Federico Mayor, director-general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), "the citizens of today are claiming rights over the citizens of tomorrow, threatening their well-being and at times their lives."

Far from being a passing phenomenon, the logic of emergency is fast becoming a permanent feature of our societies and our policies, affecting all social processes and demanding immediate results. And yet, as evidenced by the contradictions of humanitarian aid or, in Europe, of the struggle against unemployment, it is at best unclear what impact this emphasis on short-term and emergency measures can have on long-term problems.

REHABILITATING THE LONG TERM: How can we rebuild a sense of time in an age of accelerated change and globalisation? Two obstacles stand in the way. One is the ethical dominance of the social contract model, which establishes reciprocal obligations between contemporaries but fails to provide for future generations. An ethics of the future would, on the contrary, broaden the ethical community to encompass future citizens, with whom we entertain a totally asymmetrical relationship, as suggested by the Belgian philosopher François Ost. Another obstacle is what one could call the "time myopia" of today, which separates us both from our past and our future. More and more, especially in the West, the acceleration of change is used as an excuse to legitimise our blindness to the future or to claim that the future is unthinkable. Is it a surprise, then, that our future-deprived societies should cling to the motto of flexibility? "The culture of the 'just in time' finds itself increasingly at odds with that of the long term, which as yet remains the only context in which genuine development strategies can be implemented," notes the French futurist Hugues de Jouvenel.

Rehabilitating the long term means that social players and decision-makers will have to stop tinkering with the present and start anticipating. The fate of future generations will increasingly depend on our ability to enrich the present with a long-term vision. What is required is not new. "The ethics of the future", says Federico Mayor, "is an ethics of farmers. It consists in transmitting a heritage." The reinforcement of anticipation and future-oriented strategic planning capacities is therefore a priority for governments, international organisations, scientific institutions, social players and the private sector.

UNESCO has taken steps in that direction by setting up the Analysis and Forecasting Unit: with the cooperation of Candido Mendes, president of the Senior Board of the International Social Sciences Council, it convened an international meeting in July 1997 in Rio de Janeiro on "the ethics of the future". UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recently set up within his office a Strategic Planning Unit, charged with identifying emerging global trends and issues. He also proposed the convening in 2000 of a Millennium Assembly to prepare for the 21st century.

But we need to plan further. As Mayor has stated, "If we do not act 'in time', future generations will not have the time to act at all: they will become prisoners of processes that will have become unmanageable" — population growth, degradation of the global environment, growing inequalities between North and South and within societies, rampant social and urban apartheid, threats to democracy, ubiquitous mafia control, an increasing gap between "info-rich" and "info-poor". "Tomorrow is always too late". Five years after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, Agenda 21 remains, for the most part, a dead letter, if we except the timid advances registered at the Kyoto Summit. Some have spoken of "Rio plus five". Shouldn't we rather say "Rio minus five"? How long can we afford the luxury of inaction? What price for inertia? Isn't it time for an ethics of the future?

VALUES AND POLITICS: Responsibility, precaution, heritage: building an ethics of the future entails a radical evolution in our understanding of these key concepts.

Responsibility traditionally related to past actions only. It should now also be turned toward the distant future, as Hans Jonas suggested in *The Responsibility Principle*. What has been entrusted to us by nature and past generations is fundamentally fragile and perishable: life, the earth, the city itself. Our sense of responsibility toward them is a condition of their survival. Indeed, no institutional system can endure "if it is not supported by a will to live together... When this will collapses, the political organisation unravels, and quickly" (Paul Ricoeur).

In similar fashion, the principle of precaution has now become an accepted staple of international negotiations. Strategic planning and anticipation must indeed learn to take into account the unlikely, the uncertain, even the unforeseeable — in a word, learn to manage risk.

Heritage is something we build daily: "our heritage is not willed to us", a French poet wisely wrote after World War II. Its role in human affairs is not so much to transmit objects or to perpetuate values, as it is "to establish a dynamic sense of solidarity between generations, that is to give a meaning to the perpetuation of the human species" (Martine Remond-Gouilloud).

In this perspective, the meaning of heritage extends beyond stones. It encompasses the intangible and the symbolic, the ethical, the ecological, the genetic. With this in mind, UNESCO's International Bioethics Committee has prepared a draft Declaration on the protection of the human genome which will be submitted to UNESCO's General Conference in October. Heritage thus becomes a foundation of human responsibility toward future generations, provided it is conceived as a living treasure, for "in the absence of a link between the past and the future, any reference to tradition is doomed to appear as an ideological conceit, or worse as a regressive fundamentalism" (F. Ost).

These principles, and others, should guide our thoughts as we approach the 21st century. As the seventeenth-century French philosopher Pascal wrote: "Let us endeavour to think well; here is the principle of morals." Between the social compact and utopia, we must steer a path that will bring closer to us the horizon of the future, through the designing of intermediate projects still within our reach. "We are hurtling into the future, without any brakes and in conditions of zero visibility. Yet, the faster a car goes, the brighter its headlights must be," Federico Mayor has warned.

Caring about the future has profound political implications. Everywhere, the crisis of politics has coincided with a "crisis of the future". Time has come to remind ourselves of Max Weber's warning that "the proper business of the political leader is the future and responsibility toward the future," that the business of politics is to manage time. An ethics of the future is simply an ethics of time, which rehabilitates not only the future, but also the past and present. Indeed, our behaviour toward the living is usually correlated with our behaviour toward past and future generations. Those who ignore the plight of the poor and the excluded are usually those who turn a blind eye to disappearing languages or ignore the hole in the ozone layer. Sharing with present generations and caring for future generations are intimately related.

An ethics of the future will be useless if it is not translated into educational, scientific, technological, economic, financial and political measures, laying the foundations for genuinely human, sustainable development. For millions of human beings, an ethics of the future would bring the promises of the future, and some very concrete results, closer to the present. As Craig Kielburger, the 14-year-old founder of Free the Children, put it: "It also takes a child to raise a village." To paraphrase a great lawyer, the future delayed is the future denied.

The writer is the director of the Analysis and Forecasting Unit at UNESCO.

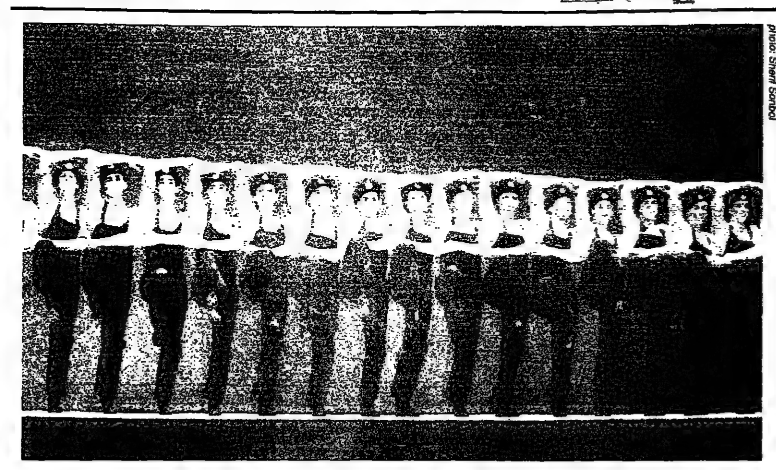


photo: Sherif Sonbol

Burning up the temple

Moiseyev Dance Company; Cairo Opera House: Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 20 Jan

David Blake sees the cauldron bubble

In war or peace, revolution or conflagration, when Russians dance the norm has split and materiality is put to shame. When that special atmosphere is loose in the air fire is in the limbs. And so it is at the Cairo Opera as the Moiseyev Company take to the stage.

Comparisons are unnecessary. Just watch. They have, almost as birthright, a quality that has no name. For the sake of convenience call it feeling — though really it is the true spirit of the dance. Such power is destructive. Like the conclusion of Toscanini conducting, one feels such revelations have been produced that it matters not an iota should the theatre fall down.

The dancing of the Moiseyev explodes all formality. They dance to the very brink of their existence. It is unselfish, noble and has nothing to do with athleticism.

As a group they have performed everywhere: timeless and inexhaustible. The group encompasses, though lightly, the entire history of Russia, from the Arctic Circle to the Black Sea, from the tiniest village to Catherine the Great's St Petersburg. In peace or war they hurl themselves into routines which simply tell the story of Russia, a story that is really not simple at all. The list of their tour triumphs seems to leave out only Timbuktu. Let the good townsfolk of that city wait, for it is certain that some day the dancers of the Moiseyev will descend on them and nothing will be the same again.

The programme covers intimate scenes — boy meets girl, cute and early Disney, though it soon flares up into girl dumps boy, leaving him to fly off and chase other flames. Such episodes are the only weak spots in a show whose view of history is perhaps a little trite and which, in performance, reduces the distaff side to passive, neat, sweet step making. There are no glamour queens in this company. It is, in reality, an all male show, and the dancers seem to relish this with a devilish abandon. Nothing is too much for them. Roll up, roll up to see what cannot be done and they will do it. This is hard on the ladies, all of whom are tall and one suspects eager to get a little more of the spotlight. Yet they are left like chaste belles, never leaving the security of the chorus line.

Men, men, men everywhere — in the air, on the floor, in dazzling army uniforms, in rags and riches, in scene after scene. One section of the show — "Partisans", choreographed by Igor Moiseyev himself, was stunning. The army, all in black, ride or gallop on stage in huge cloaks that cover them entirely and trail behind in preposterous billows. The show never halts an instant. The energy output must be ferocious. They battle, jostle, strut and presumably slay, always fiercely army proper. A style and a history is presented, and it comes from Catherine's Russia, from a time when Gregori Orlov managed fantastical leaps from bed to saddle in a single stride. Cinematic in the simple fury of its movements, "Partisans" leaves the audience wondering just where we are. Is this imperial Russia or Stalin's? No matter, and no comment. It is the boys who count. They go through hair-raising routines, to the brink of disaster. Only the Beijing Opera or the Abdadas, who ride their galloping camels bare-backed and standing can match this company for throwaway daring. The audience leaves the auditorium feeling rather less than inadequate.

As the show progresses it gets better and more tempestuous. The company have long lines of dance communication. Some pieces develop flamenco tendencies, stamping into full Spanish dance. The Kalmuk Dances, from the steppes at the mouth of the Volga, begin quietly enough. Then the choreography gives the company an opportunity to display its versatility. They transform, in turns, into eagles, seabirds plunging for fish, deer and finally battling bulls.

The Ajarian War Dance comes from the Caucasian mountains. They dance to the dole, a twangy, bitter-tasting instrument. The rhythms dazzle, like hail falling on a tin roof. Moldavia — the word rolls of the tongue. The Moldavian Dance is equally splendid. And at last the men give way. There are black flowing head-dresses and an absence of the cute and cosy as the women of the troop let loose a riot of movement, from lyric to speed racing.

As a change from the endless turmoil of the dancing, came a short dance called "Old City Quadrille". Two barrel chested young men cruise the city fair with their girls. They, not the girls, do the showing off. The clock stops a bit here. Russia is not like this anymore, though the sound of the balalaika is. It's thrilling swoon is timeless, and resonates throughout the human comedy.

Suddenly the stage fills with sailors, rosy cheeked, dressed as sailors always are, and camp as a row of tents. What do they do at sea, these lads. Here, at least, they dance. Sailors tend to hate the sea. Fortunately there is not much sea in this ballet, but plenty of sailors. The stage fills with long lines of them, stretching and twisting with remarkable agility. The tunes played for this dance are jaunty and seaworthy. Moiseyev's invention is endless, as is the elevation. The precision and technical poise are peerless. Fascination mounts trying to count the lines. You can't, they move too quickly.

It has a pounding thrill, like a Broadway musical. *Chorus Line* will do, or better still the great Busby Berkeley *Gold Diggers of Broadway* musicals. Could anyone do it better? They set the cold geometry of dance on fire. No one wanted it to stop. They kept on moving like light flashes until the sellout audience stands and applauds.

For sheer beauty and pleasure "Gypsies" is hard to beat. It opens with the best dresses of the evening. Spectacular, oriental, we are in Bessarabia, on the borders of Rumania. Then out of the shadows emerge the men, like golden slaves, extras from a *Scherezade* orgy. The dance reaches a frenzy. The ballet is beautifully dressed, and there is amazement at the stretches of palpable gold.

You might be forgiven for thinking, as each new section begins, that the standard will not be maintained, that they will languish and loose their immaculate flourish. But each piece seems to get better. The dancers are inspired by their own expertise. What practice, work and dedication. How high the master of it all sets his standards. What blood-stained labour goes into the apparently easy, almost laconic style of dancing? In "Gypsies" the women finally get their chance. Bathed in gold, shimmering, the orchestra is put through its paces. The orchestral director is Anatoli Gous, the concert master Roman Kolobkov. Anna Petrova is responsible for costumes. Sergei Igolkin the boot maker, creator of the marvelous footwear on which the entire show rests.

There comes a Platter Dance from Uzbekistan, a solo with a carpet merchant in noble stripes. And then comes a wrestling number, "Two Boys in a Fight", from the Nanayan people, who inhabit the frozen north. They wrestle themselves all over the stage, almost into the orchestra pit. And then the surprise ending. The costume is removed to reveal that these two wrestlers are actually one.

So to "Gopak", the folkloric centre of all Russian dance, the most difficult, complicated, gravity-defying one of all. It is full of the kind of feats only Russians will attempt. It comes from the Ukraine, this dance of celebration and joy. Moiseyev has choreographed several versions of the "Gopak". The one presented is extraordinary. And all we can do is thank Moiseyev, and hope God blesses all his children.

Music

City on screen

Alexandria has starred as backdrop in many of this year's Ramadan soaps. Khairiya El-Bishlawi examines the enduring, *cinematic presence of the city*

And it all happened where...in Alexandria of course

It is not only British novelist Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* that celebrates the Mediterranean city, which figures as a setting, at times even a protagonist, in the art of Egyptians such as Naguib Mahfouz, Edwar El-Kharrat, Abdel-Hamid Gouda El-Sahhar, Albert Cosseiry, Ossama Anwar Okasha, Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid, Gamil Attiya, Hossameddin Mustafa and Youssef Chahine, among so many others. It should come as no real surprise, then, that the real star of this Ramadan's television serials is none other than the city itself. In three serials, at least, *Al-Taw'am* (The Twins), *Al-Shari' Al-Gadid* (The New Street), and *Zizinia*, it is the Mediterranean port, and Egypt's one time summer capital, that is the protagonist.

There is much with which to take issue in *Zizinia*, not least the misguided casting of undoubtedly good actors, and the fearsomely unconvincing make-up. However, the mise-en-scène and choice of settings, which are very faithful to the spirit of Alexandria, manage to carry the day. Likewise, Ossama Anwar Okasha's characterisation and dialogue could not be more evocative. Okasha, through the characters, accentuates the hybrid and cosmopolitan nature of 1930s Alexandria: there is Bishr Amer, with an Egyptian merchant father and an Italian aristocratic mother, Aïda, the young divorcee, whose Arabic is tinged with a French accent and who befriends the Italian Sylvana, Rena, the Greek girl who falls in love with the son of the coffee-house owner and joins an underground anti-British movement where she meets fellow comrade Badi'a Asfour, hitherto a bellydancer.

Any Egyptian who purports to show Alexandria on screen cannot help being indebted to Youssef Chahine. Granted, there have been other Egyptian films about and/or set in Alexandria, not least among them the film version of Naguib Mahfouz' *Miramar* (1969), with its unforgettable and highly allegorical tensions between Zohra, the peasant girl, on the one hand, and the various residents of the pension, from Mariana the Greek proprietor to representatives of the feudal land-owners, the socialists, revolutionaries and so on.

Yet, the most memorable filmic renditions of the city have to be Chahine's autobiographical trilogy, *Iskenderiya Leih* (Alexandria, Why?), *Haddouta Masriya* (An Egyptian Tale) and *Iskenderiya Kaman Wa Kaman* (Alexandrie Encore et Toujours) where Alexandria is not only a moving force, but forms the consciousness of Chahine's portrait of the artist as a young man. There is no doubt, furthermore, that both Chahine and Okasha have read *The Alexandria Quartet* and found in it a complex objective correlative for the prismatic nature of the city. It should be pointed out here, though, that both Okasha and Chahine have an edge over Durrell which they manipulate to great advantage: both being "native" Alexandrians, they have a knowledge of the city to which he could never aspire. The action in Durrell, for example, is mostly set in the fashionable, elite districts of Alexandria from which it only departs to move to equally fashionable and elite beaches, with an occasional visit to the "Arab quarter" — a highly exoticised version characterised by the lewd, Dionysian practices of the natives.

In *Alexandria, Why?* the sea is seen both as itself, and also as a beckoning temptation to get away, to ride the waves, as it were, to another shore — the "dream factory" of Hollywood. In *Alexandrie Encore et Toujours*, we meet with ancient Alexandria, the city of Alexander the Great and Cleopatra, as a counterpoint to the trauma of creation which the artist-hero of the film faces.

Alexandrie Encore et Toujours was made in 1990 and, at the close of the nineties, Okasha revisits the same terrain, both the physical city and the many themes that have come to form its myth, not least among them the bubbling, under the surface underground movement aspect. He takes us not only to the eponymous district of Zizinia, but also to more popular areas of the city like Karmouz and Manshiya. And in drawing his prismatic portrait of the city, Okasha too has paid homage to the melting pot that is Alexandria.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Kamal Khalifa
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 7.30pm-10.30pm; Fri 7.30pm-10.30pm. Until 13 Feb.

Hamdi Abdallah (Drawings) & **Fathy Ahmed** (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Opening 4 Feb, 7pm. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 21 Feb.

Margo Veillon
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Opening 3 Feb. Daily exc Sun, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 25 Feb.
Paintings under the title L'Image du Reve et de L'Imagination.

Jeanette El-Wakeel
Sony Gallery, American University in Cairo, Main Campus, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Opening 2 Feb, 7pm. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 26 Feb.
Thirty-six colour photographs by the American photographer portraying life, especially of children, on the streets, lanes, fields and marketplaces in and around Cairo.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

Hamdi Abdallah

FILMS

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Ressala Ila Al-Wali (Message to the Wali)
Drive In, entrance of El-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0831. Daily 6.30pm & 9.30pm; Thur & Fri midnight show. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm & 9pm. Odeon I, 4 Dr Andel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Adel Imam and Youssra, directed by Sherif Arafa.

Tamania wa Arbe'in Saa Fi Isra'il (48 Hours in Israel)
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily, 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Nadia El-Guidi and Farouq El-Fishawi, directed by Nader Galal.

Hysteria
Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
With Ahmed Zaki and Abla Kamel, directed by Adel Adib.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
The largest box-office hit in the history of Egyptian cinema, with Hanan Tork, Khaled El-Nabawi, Mohamed Heneidi and singer Mohamed Fouad.

DANCE

The Moiseyev Dance Company
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. Until 29 Jan, 8pm. For the exact time, check the venue.
Performing the Russian dance, the Kalmyk dance, the Belorussian comic dance, the Yurochka gypsy dance, the Finnish polka, the Gopak Ukranian folk dance and the Egyptian dance.

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya Sq, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 30 Jan, 9pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Munich Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 4 Feb 8pm.
Performing Moussorsky's *A Night on a Bold Mountain*, Beethoven's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4.

THEATRE

El-Tayeb Wel-Sherrir (The Good and The Bad)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily, 10pm.
Yehia El-Fakharani, Sawsan Badr, Mohamed Metwalli and Sayed Azmi perform under the direction of Ahmed Abdel-Halim, in a play scripted by Alfred Farag with songs written by Gamal Bekhit.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm; Thur. 9.30pm.
With Salah El-Saadani, Samah Anwar, Mahmoud El-Guendi, Ashraf Abdel-Baqi, Hala Fakher, Hussein El-Imam, Hassan El-Asmar and Sommaya.

Allahom Eg'aloh Kheir (May All End Well)
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 390 7707. Daily 9.30pm.
Scripted by Lenin El-Ramly, with poetry by Sayed Hegab, the play is directed by Mohsen Helmy. With Ali El-Haggar, Rania Farid Shawqi, Ashraf Abdel-Ghafour, Abdel-Rahman Abu Zahra.

Alabanda
El-Fardous Theatre, El-Beouth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 9.30pm.
With bellydancer Dina, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Sherif Mounir, Mohamed Heneidi, Alaa Waleieddin, Magda Zaki, Magda Zaki, Ahmed El-Saqqa, Ahmed Aql and Hani Ramzi.

Essha Ya Nayem (Wake Up, Sleepy Head)
El-Talia, Zaki Tolaimat Hall, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 593 7948. Daily 9.30pm.
Sabri Abdel-Moneim, Rabab, Ahdy Sadeq, Abdel-Hamid El-Mounir and Mohamed Youssef perform under the direction of Maher Selim.

Wallah Zaman Ya Fatma (It's Been So Long, Fatma)
El-Salam Theatre, Youssef Idris Hall, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 10pm.
Abir El-Sharqawi, Mohamed Abdel-Razeq and Mohamed Abdin perform in a production scripted by Fouad Haggag and directed by Hossameddin Salah.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 3863952. Daily 8.30; Wed & Thur, 10pm.
With Adel Imam.

LECTURES

Des Langues et Des Usages Linguistiques en Egypte
CEDEJ, 14 Abdel-Rahman El-Sawi (ex-Gam'eyet El-Nisr) St, Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 3 Feb, 5pm.
Lecture, in French, by Dr Madiha Doss, Cairo University and Dr Catherine Miller, CEDEJ.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

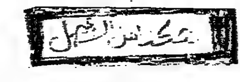


Hassan Osman

Extra Gallery is given over to a joint exhibition of works by **Kamel Zoheiri** and **Hassan Osman**, the former a media figure, the latter a well-known critic. The sheer variety of material, modes and styles employed by Osman — ranging from murals to multimedia works via painting — underscore his claim that in this age of the global village, art should be inter-disciplinary.

Zoheiri, meanwhile, remains an incorrigible romantic, as seen in his choice of pastels, still lifes, his seascapes and flower paintings. His works, a number of critics have consistently argued, straddle the divide between painting and music.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**



Westward gazing

Alexandria 1860-1960: The brief life of a cosmopolitan community, ed. Robert Ilbert, Ilias Yannakakis with Jacques Hassoun, tr Colin Clement. Alexandria: Harpocrates, 1997



Clockwise from top: Ramleh Casino, San Stefano, circa 1925; pigeon shooting on the Mahmoudieh Canal, circa 1900; Ramleh Station, circa 1950

One has become accustomed to seeing Alexandria as a protagonist in the writings of 'foreigners', Durrell, Sole, Cialente, Tsirkas, Aciman and many more, but except for Mahfouz, El-Kharat and Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid, the city has not figured much in the works by Egyptian writers. And though it is true that the city dominates *Miramar*, Mahfouz is primarily the exponent of Cairo. It was, therefore, with some anticipation that viewers followed the television serial *Zizinia* by Ossama Anwar Okasha, enticed by its promises to present facets of cosmopolitan Alexandria in the forties not usually dealt with in Arabic literature but succinctly and memorably depicted by Durrell. Scenes from the Quartet will invariably come to mind while watching Okasha's saga (Scobie and Abdel-Fattah). Okasha, through the media of television, had already dramatised the vital and pressing problem that threatens Alexandria's old villas and palaces that were built by affluent *khawagas*, in *The White Flag*, a serial that is now considered a landmark in the socio-cultural history of the country.

Alexandria 1860-1960: the brief life of a cosmopolitan community, admirably translated into English by Colin Clement from the French edition of 1992, is a book that claims to present "the life of this city, balanced between the Ottoman empire, imperialism, and Arab nationalism". Covering a very crucial period in the history of the Middle East, it may be considered as a historical document though the overall impression the book leaves one with is that Alexandria, for all those who contributed to writing it, is basically "the capital of memory," as Lawrence Durrell put it. The photographs of a bygone Alexandria that illustrate the book help to enhance such nostalgia: the one that particularly affected me was that showing the Bourse with its clock that was always punctual and towards which one's gaze always turned when passing through Manshia. On the right of the same photograph stands a gleaming white stone kiosk where the police band used to perform marches and popular tunes every week!

The book is the collective work of one time Alexandrians who are.. in search of identity?... *a la recherce du temps perdu*? They comprise sometime members of the different communities who at a certain period in the modern history of Egypt formed a cosmopolitan society that dominated Alexandria and gave it a specific character that differed markedly from the rest of the country. Yannakakis, after a visit to Cairo, says: "I remember the happy feelings which swept over me when, taking the Desert Road, we set off for Alexandria... At that moment, I had the impression that I was crossing a frontier: I had just left Egypt for Alexandria." It was the Alexandria ad Aegyptum that was the home of those cosmopolitan communities. Stating the plan of the book, Robert Ilbert points out that their aim was not "to paint a unified picture but, rather, to lay out the elements of a world which, without retaining any traces of antiquity, nevertheless recaptured the glorious past."

By "the past", Ilbert obviously meant the Ptolemaic, Greek past, composed essentially of a Macedonian colony, a Greek community, Jewish immigrants who came in large numbers in the wake of Alexander as well as immigrants in lesser numbers from Syria, Asia Minor and the western Mediterranean — Italians, Syracusans, Libyans, Carthaginians etc. There is even evidence of individuals who came from as far as India. They all streamed into Egypt attracted by the opportunities of work, wealth and fame. The Egyptian population, of course, formed the basic stratum of society and, numerically, were the largest single community. It was they who provided the necessary labour force. They lived in the southern district of the city, wore their own special garb and kept to their own language and way of life. Yet a number of them, who belonged to the middle class and wished to improve their social status, gradually became Hellenised, adopting Greek names and Greek costumes.

The similarity of this "glorious past" and Alexandria between 1860 and 1960 is very striking. The voice of Cavafy is, maybe, "the most faithful to the spirit of the town... Cavafy unrolls a nostalgia for an ancient and legendary Alexandria and, ingeniously, re-establishes a perfect, uninterrupted line of intimate connections between this and the Alexandria where he was born and lived." An enormous bridge is spanned across centuries that are meant to be overlooked, and thus one sees only two Alexandrias, both belonging to the West.

From the end of the 1880's onward, as in the third century BC, thousands of immigrants flocked to the city secure under the protection of the British occupation. The very idea of assimilation or integration into Egyptian, or rather "Arab" society, was alien to the community spirit that each — Greek, Armenian, Italian, Jewish, etc — formed for itself. As Yannakakis puts it, "the ethnic, religious and linguistic identity of community members replaced the weak, uncertain, even mythical sense of belonging to a nation state which often did not exist. Paradoxically, it was external cultural inputs, essentially European, that propped up the community identity."

Alexandria was a "vague melting pot of multifaceted identities" and strict "lines were drawn between nationalities." This is clearly obvious in the writings of the Greek, Italian and Armenian contributors. The Italians for example, we are told, "could not help but oscillate between Caesar and Pharaoh" ; they were caught in a "troubling game of mirrors." Forming a communal life in Alexandria, yet their adherence to their mother country remained strong and in 1915 many fought on the Italian front. An amusing but rather poignantly pathetic story is told about a "respectable" Italian lady who "without the slightest hesitation donated her wedding ring to support the war effort in Ethiopia." while admitting, "in all frankness, that she had previously taken the care to have a double made so that she could keep the original."

Likewise the Greek community, which was the largest in Alexandria, expressed strong ethnic allegiance to the 'homeland', the Hellenic state, which most of them had never known. The Armenians, who had come mainly as exiles, settled into the city as another community layer. And each layer adhered to its language, religion and customs. Mixed marriages were the exception rather than the rule.

The Jews formed, as Jacques Hassoun puts it, a community of contrasts. The Italian consul in Alexandria, in a report dated 8 September, 1938, wrote: "instead of forming a single group, they [the Jews] belong to a good sixteen different nationalities... frequently, members of one and the same family hold different nationalities." Many were Egyptians, though, according to Hassoun "Egyptians they may have been but they would become or dreamed of becoming white-Israelite-Europeans: that is, civilised... certainly, the more orthodox tried, through religion, to keep their former status. This only contributed to the association of speaking Arabic with being poverty-stricken and obscurest... Outside a very thin layer of intellectuals resolutely attached to Egypt, the majority dreamt only of leaving the country."

Who were the Egyptians of Alexandria? Paul Balta, of French nationality, distinguishes between the so-called "indigenous element" — workers, domestics, minor civil servants — the Westernised Egyptian bourgeoisie and the range of "Egyptianised" passport holders: Turks, Levantines, Jews, Greeks and other non-Arab Mediterraneans who knew no homeland other than Alexandria. There were also the "Europeanised" among whom were the Jews, as well as the French *sujets* or *protégés*. As with most Alexandrians, they were polyglot, though emotionally drawn to France, which, for its part, gave them support and a passport, though not the status of citizen. Certain consulates sold passports. "In this way," writes Balta, "the father of my friend Ibrahim had bought Spanish identity in the 1920's." The same with British passport holders, mainly Maltese and Cypriots. Added to these were the stateless and the "Mitteleuropeans" who, with no precise national attachments, could not quite visualise themselves as Egyptians.

This feeling of alienation, of not wanting to integrate into the society in which they had sought refuge, emerges quite clearly from the book. The accounts, from the various points of view — Greek, Italian, Armenian, Syrian-French and Jewish — reminisce about a time when Alexandria belonged to them, when Egyptians were basically "les Arabes", to be looked down upon, and when it was possible to spend 50 years in Egypt, like André Aciman's great-grandmother, and "proudly" boast that she had "never learned more than fifty words of Arabic." Memories are mixed with emotional yearning, regret, nostalgia and sometimes even with an uncontrolled sense of bitterness, of injustice and of wounds that are hard to heal.

Significantly, in 1938, the Italians of Alexandria unveiled "with great pomp, a monument erected to the glory of the Khedive Ismail, the symbol of an Egypt turned towards the West." That statue has now disappeared and few remember that it once stood on the plinth that now bears a monument to the memory of the unknown Egyptian soldier.

Reviewed by **Azza Kararah**

Plain Talk

I am a great believer in the importance of a sound knowledge of history, and deplore the neglect of its teaching in schools. At one point it was not a compulsory subject, and pupils had the choice of skipping history altogether. Now, however, the situation has been reversed and our past is, once again, a compulsory subject. Yet in Britain, the minister of education has decided that history should not be compulsory for 5-11 year-olds, while suggesting that primary schools should "have regard" of the idea of teaching it.

The decision has created a wave of criticism and attacks against the minister. In one such article, published in *The Sunday Times*, Andrew Roberts puts forward an argument with which I totally agree. Roberts quotes Cicero as saying: "To know nothing of what happened before you were born is to remain forever a child."

Roberts proposes the addition of a fourth "R" to the traditional three "Rs", to stand for "remembrance". He cites examples of young peoples' ignorance of modern history. Surveys show, for instance, that there are gaps in even the most basic knowledge. During the 50th anniversary of VE day (Victory Europe, as distinct from VJ day), the *Sunday Times* carried out tests on 1,600 state school pupils which showed that 24 per cent could not identify Adolf Hitler, and that more than half did not know that the Battle of Britain was fought in the air.

This reminded me of an informal survey I once carried out. I discovered that a large number of university students knew nothing of our national leaders: Mohamed Farid, Mustafa Kamel, Orabi; even Saad Zaghloul meant nothing to them.

It was that ignorance which led me to start a campaign to give history its due place in the curricula, because a country with no history is a country without an identity. And, as Roberts puts it, "if we do not know where we have come from, we are unlikely to have a clear idea where we should go to."

It was, therefore, with great pleasure that I watched the Ramadan historical soaps on Egyptian television. Critics have found fault with them, naturally, and yet I strongly support the showing of these soaps. They deal with a vital era in our history, when the nationalist spirit was on the rise and Egyptian identity was affirmed. And if there are some exaggerations, this is to be expected in drama. Normal events cannot, by themselves, make drama.

I remember attending a lecture given by Toynbee about history. He posed the question whether history was art or science and concluded that it was both. It is art in the sense that it is narrative, and it is science because of its methodological rigour. There is, of course, a limit to how historical facts can be tampered with in literary works, but the writer should have license to introduce characters and spice things up a bit.

This seems to be exactly what the authors of the current soaps have done. As far as I can tell, the historical facts are there untouched, but the plots and sub-plots are all inventions by the writers.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Seasons and cycles

La Ahad Yanam fil-Iskandariya (Nobody Sleeps in Alexandria), Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid. Cairo: Dar El-Helal, 1996

Nobody sleeps in Alexandria because a war is on. Everybody's life is disrupted by the dangerous proximity of the Germans to the first line of Egyptian defence. In the harum-scarum of air raids everyone scampers off to the shelters. In these, the human factor asserts itself over whatever differences exist, whether they be social, regional or confessional. Womb-like, the shelters become a metaphor for Egypt which has, down the ages, embraced Muslim, Christian and Jew.

The inception of World War II and the fierce battles culminating in El-Alamein form the subject of Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid's latest novel. His native Alexandria is there as both edifice and towering metaphor. On the practical level, this novel could serve as guidebook to the city, its history and geography. The focus, however, is not on the luxury resort of the rich, but on the old Alexandria: Kom El-Shoafa, Karmouz and Mena El-Bassal, where ordinary people mill about, sweating out an existence while treading on ground saturated with history. Abdel-Meguid uses each and every occasion to zoom in on that past.

"At the café, Dimitri told him about Karmouz, Rakuda which Alexander joined with Pharos... Rakuda is now a dangerous place, full of drugs and criminals, but in history it was the place of torture for Christians... Pompey's Pillar is built on Bab Sedra hill upon which, in the past, were built Roman temples and arenas where wrestling matches fought to the death were held." Sometimes, as we follow the author through the mazes of the ancient city, we almost wish he had included maps.

As is usual with Alexandrian narratives, the city eventually looms as indomitable, an Alexandria in history but an Alexandria larger than history. The city towers over all the characters, dwarfing their existence, making its own survival more important than theirs.

Abdel-Meguid's native city is also well-suited to the main theme of the novel, that of universality. The cosmopolitan Alexandria of the 1930's and 1940's is an excellent matrix of pluralism. We are given an insider's view of many of the ethnic communities whose multi-culturalism lent the city an incredible richness and turned it into an ideal place for Everyman. In this context, no one is excluded, and no one is marginalised: saints, prostitutes, criminals and respectable citizens; they all dwell side by side.

Zahra, forced into exile, is a newcomer to the city. She not only sees it with the fresh eyes of a novice, she also brings in the regional stance of the conservative Upper Egyptian, shocked into beholding Europeanised manners for the first time. In keeping with the tone of the book, she is never self-righteously judgmental. At times, Zahra's education (and ours) seems natural enough; she is full of wonder as she explores the city, not only through its mouth-watering *fruits de mer*, but also through the caprice of its winter storms. However, at other times Zahra's education — as when a street vendor discourses on Alexander the Great — seems tacked on.

The novel is very rich culturally; something made apparent not only by the continuous surfing between religious, the arts, local and international politics, but further borne out by chapter epigraphs from a vast diversity of sources: Pharaonic, Babylonian, Coptic; El-Halag and El-Roumi alongside Tagore, Cavafy, Durrell, Lorca and Eluard. In tune with the recent trend in Egyptian literature, fiction is foiled with documentary. The latter is a hodge-podge of crucial events, interspersed with trivia, all rattled off like a newsreel in an emotionless, impersonal tone. There is something to satisfy every taste, from petty crime and domestic news to international affairs. Especially interesting is the state of the arts, which includes premieres of such movies as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Gone with the Wind* as well as Umm Kalthoum and Abdel-Wahab songs.

The panoramic scope of the documentaries lends the novel a special tone, that of the grand narrative. The destiny of the characters seems only part of the larger destiny of the human family. The seasons and cycles of life, mythically, tie people together in rituals of death and regeneration. The narrative has energy when it comes to the bold strokes, the overview of history and the overview of human life. Politics, war and death seem real enough when painted on the larger cosmic drama of life, but individual characters looked at too closely seem more like puppets than real human beings. The novel is almost plotless, floating on syllogisms rather than organic action. The characters derive their importance from their identity, and their destinies seem more symbolic than real.

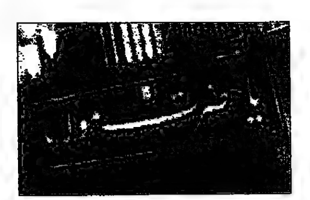
Anyone looking for realistic narrative is bound to be disappointed. The novel is at its best when it breaks the bounds of realism and soars into the world of irrealism and of the mythical. Perhaps for this reason, the first part of the narrative is the best. It is in the tradition of Latin American writers — if not exactly magic realism, it is realism with magic. The sweeping, early part, tells the story of Bahy (Beautiful), born with a halo and irresistibly attractive to women, something which causes a family feud that claims almost all the males on both sides. Nothing in the subsequent narrative is fit to hold a candle to this breath-taking anecdote (for unfortunately, anecdote is what it turns out to be).

The friendship between Magd El-Din and Damian, forming the core of the book, is informed by a thesis. The author painstakingly points out the parallelisms of the religious: parallel fasts, parallel feasts, parallel saints, parallel liturgies and parallel moulids. But by now we have moved from the world of magic into the world of theory; albeit a commendable one. It is a humane message, one which seeks to break down the confines of fanaticism by reconciling German with British, Sikh with Muslim, Sudanese with Egyptian but above all, Copt with Muslim. At best, the theme is handled with insufficient subtlety, at worst it seems loquacious and redundant. Perhaps the author attempts too much. This four hundred page novel is throttled with epic style narrative alongside collage, with too many metaphors and too many characters. The strengths of the novel remain the roller-coaster documentaries and the magic of the irrealistic narrative, reluctantly undertaken but boldly executed.

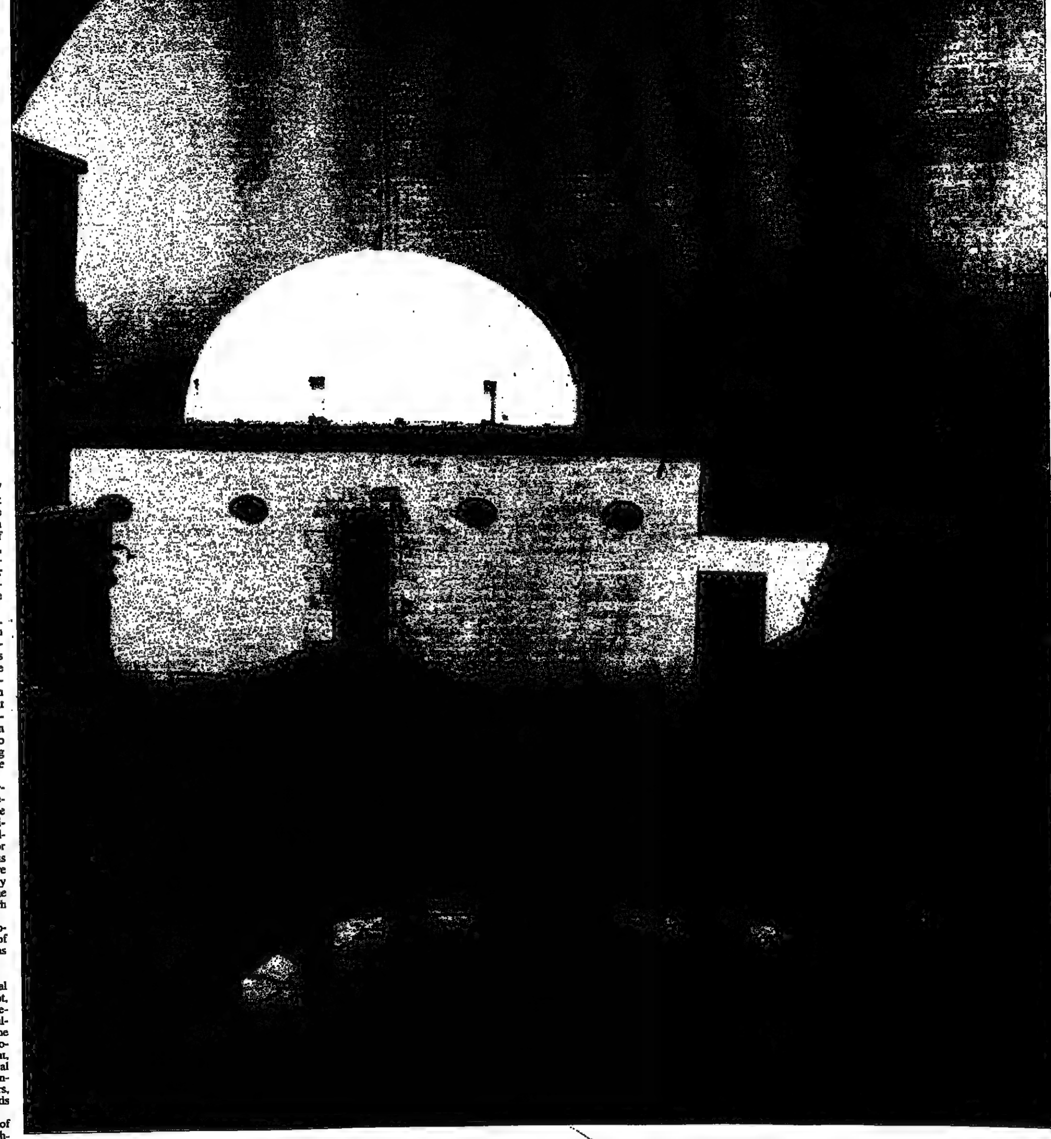
Reviewed by **Nazek Fahmy**

Al-Ahram Weekly

29 January - 4 February 1998



Celestial s



The assemblage of buildings commonly referred to as the complex of the Mevlevi (Mawlawi) Dervishes is situated at the foot of the Citadel, near Sultan Hassan Mosque, along the ancient axis of Al-Shari' Al-A'zam (the Great Street) which linked Cairo to Fustat and today runs beyond Bab Zuweila to Bab Al-Futouh. The complex's best-known feature is the Yazbak Palace on the eastern side of the area, which was built and enlarged several times, under Qawsun, Yazbak and Aqbardi, between the 14th and 15th centuries. The western side of the complex, fronting Al-Suyufiya Street, includes the Mausoleum of Hassan Sadaqa, the minaret, and the *madrasa* of Sunqur Sa'di, partially re-used by the Mawlawi Dervishes, who built their Sama'khana (the Hall of Listening) above it.

The whole area was given to the confraternity in 1607 by Prince Sinan, "and they, in various phases, adapted the existing buildings to their needs," writes the architect who restored the complex, Giuseppe Fanfoni, head of the Italian-Egyptian Centre for Restoration and Archaeology, in *The Restoration and Conservation of Egyptian Monuments in Egypt* (The American University in Cairo Press, 1995).

While generally preserving the existing structure of the Yazbak Palace, the Mawlawi Dervishes added a new wing on Al-Suyufiya Street, which allowed direct access to the Aqbardi garden and the reception area, and comprised eighteen cells for the monks attached to the convent of the order.

The Sama'khana is a circular area, symbolically surmounted by a dome. Other functional spaces are arranged around it, such as "the spectators' area, the orchestra, the places for the reciters of the Qur'an and the Matnawi verses, and finally the Mausoleum," writes Fanfoni. The presence of a *mihrab* and a *minbar* suggests that the Sama'khana was also sometimes used as a mosque, and that its layout may have been superimposed over that of the mosque. In general, the Sama'khana had two functions: that of a mosque, for prayer and veneration of the saint buried in the mausoleum; and that of the "theatre" in which the listening rite was performed. The floor plan, therefore, was arranged to reconcile these two purposes.

BATTLING THE ODDS: Unlike some monuments of Islamic Cairo which are being restored/renovated in record time, using state-of-the-art methods and tools, the rehabilitation of the Mawlawi complex has taken years. A long-term project, it suffered from a chronic shortage of funds. The group of Italian experts (scholars, technicians, artisans and students) who undertook the project under the guidance of Professor Giuseppe Fanfoni is now working under the umbrella of the Italian-Egyptian Restoration Centre (CFPR), the group's official title since 1988.

Restoration of the architectural complex, which comprises several buildings dating from different eras and designed for different purposes, began in 1979, sustained by contributions from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project, the brainchild of Fanfoni and Carla Burri, the director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Cairo, was initiated through a joint agreement between the Italian Cultural Institute, Cairo University, the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation and Professor Fanfoni, who contributed two months of summer holidays (from his teaching job at the University of Rome), working on the restoration every year.

In 1984, the agreement was extended as the result of the intervention of the Direzione Generale per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the University of Rome (La Sapienza). These two bodies offered to set up a *cantiere-scuola* (centre for professional training) on the site. Students of this school, the Italian-Egyptian Restoration Centre in Cairo, which offers a four-year work-study programme, participated in the restoration of the Sama'khana of the Mawlawi Dervishes, which was achieved in 1988.

The Sama'khana was only opened to the public ten years later, since extensive restoration of the foundations of the *madrasa* below it was necessary.

INJECTING NEW LIFE: Like most historical monuments and archaeological sites in Egypt, the Mawlawi complex presented problems related to the geological origin and physical-chemical properties of the building materials, the geological characteristics of the soil, the geographical and social features of the environment, and recently, pollution caused by industrial waste. Occasional catastrophic events can increase the effects of these permanent factors, causing the decay and eventual loss of hundreds of monuments.

Professor Fanfoni has initiated a programme of research at the CFPR, which includes data gathering and analysis of the main causes of architectural deterioration and the testing of various restoration techniques, particularly in relation to the control of moisture damage produced by air humidity or ground water absorbed by the walls and foundations of the buildings. He has applied these techniques to the restoration of the various units of the Mawlawi complex.

The injection system (consisting of the injection of special waterproof resins) was experimented on successfully in the Sama'khana, while the walls of the open hall of the Sunqur Sa'di *madrasa* and those of the Mausoleum of Hassan Sadaqa, on which Fanfoni is working now, have required cutting across the width of the wall with a special blade — made in Egypt to Fanfoni's specifications — allowing for the insertion of a layer of waterproof material (PVC strips of a special shape). A particular mixture of expansion-controlled and sulfate-proof ferric cement, free of chlorides, is injected immediately after the insertion of the sheets of PVC.

Fanfoni stresses, however, that while many of these techniques may solve the problems of rising dampness in most Egyptian monuments, even on a large scale, they require "technical devices for every case, machinery fit for the intervention, a specialised technical staff and appropriate expenses."

COMING TO TOWN: The Mawlawiyya, like the Naqshabandiyya and other Sufi orders, could live a life of seclusion and meditation. "Only a minority of adherents of such orders devoted their whole lives to the path," however, according to Albert Hourani (*A History of the Arab Peoples*, New York, 1991). "Most of the members of the order lived in the world...; these might include women as well as men."

The Mawlawi Dervishes are the order which seems to have attracted the attention of travellers, probably because of the "spectacular" nature of their rite; they are generally described as "whirling" dervishes.

The order originated in Turkey. Its founder, Jalaleddin Al-Rumi, was born in Balkh, in Afghanistan (then Khorasan) on 30 September 1207, the son of the great mystic Bahaaeddin Walid, known as the Sultan of the Wise. Having wandered for many years, Al-Rumi eventually settled in the Turkish town of Konia, where he died in 1273. His tomb is still a place of pilgrimage for people from all over the world.

"Compared to Francis of Assisi for his sensitivity and Jacopone da Todi for the profundity of his expression, he is considered the greatest mystic poet of all times," writes Fanfoni in a publication issued by the centre on the occasion of the inauguration of the Sama'khana (28 July 1988).

It is during the 16th century that Sufism experienced a period of particular efflorescence. Many political and cultural celebrities became associated with the Mawlawi order, which eventually acquired the role of an influential elite. In the 17th century, the order was entrusted with the investiture of the new sultan and, following Ottoman territorial expansion, a number of Mawlawi centres were established throughout the Muslim world.

During this period the Mawlawi Dervishes (known as the Mawlawiyya) settled in Egypt. The first ministerial act referring to donations received by the order in Cairo is dated 1607: "A copy of this act of donation [by] Prince Yusuf Sinan," writes Fanfoni, "is dated 17 Safar 1016 AH/ 1607 AD (Archives of the Ministry of *Awqaf*)."

The text establishes the exact boundaries of the *tikiyya* (convent) and other donations of land that were to generate the income necessary to pay the employees of the convent; the text specifies the number of employees, as well as the jobs they performed. The text, explains Fanfoni, shows that the Mawlawiyya had for some time occupied an area bordering that which was donated to them.

Even though Turkish documents relating to the order speak of journeys to Cairo and residence in that city in earlier times, it is likely that the dervishes did not organise themselves in their complex until after the Ottoman conquest.

While a number of Mawlawi dervishes may have participated actively in the celebrations of the *moulid* of Al-Hussein, some members of the order led a secluded life within the confines of their monastery and performed the *Sama'* (listening) rite in a special area known as the Sama'khana, where spectators were free to attend the ceremony.

LISTENING IN CIRCLES: The *Sama'* ceremony consisted of two phases, preceded and followed by prayers and recitations. The *Dawr-i-Waladi* comprised three counterclockwise rounds; the *Salam* included three or four circles, always counterclockwise, rotating along two different orbits. While performing the rounds, the dervishes whirled on their own axes at the same time, keeping the palm of the right hand turned upwards, in the direction of the dome's centre, and the palm of the left hand turned downwards. In this way, they received the power of their movement along the vertical axis of the Sama'khana in the same way as it is believed to be received from the stars in other mystical and Sufi conceptions.

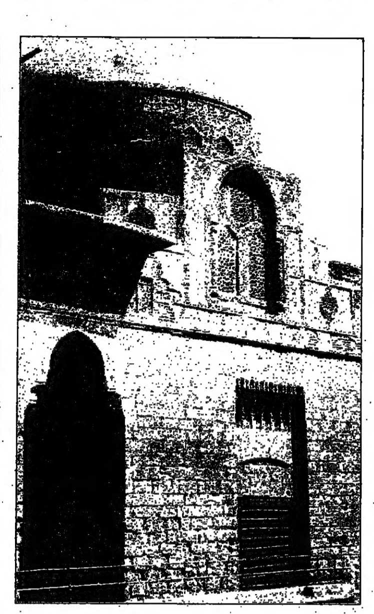
This performance was called the *muqabala* and later inspired other Sufi orders. "Nevertheless, for the Mawlawis it constitutes, according to the order's literature, the fundamental rite of the life of the confraternity since the 14th century," according to M Molé (cited by Fanfoni

spheres

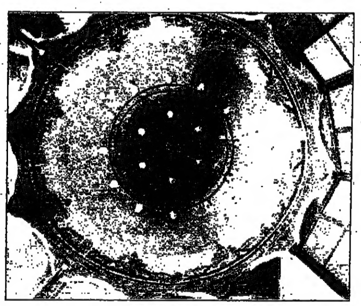
The Cairo Sama'khana, after half a century of neglect and decay, has been restored and was recently opened to the public, thanks to the patient efforts of an Italian architect whose labour of love made it possible for the Company of Mawlawi Dervishes, formed by the Turkish Ministry of Culture in 1990, to perform in the original setting of their order. Fayza Hassan reviews the history of the "whirling dervishes" and visits the site of their devotions





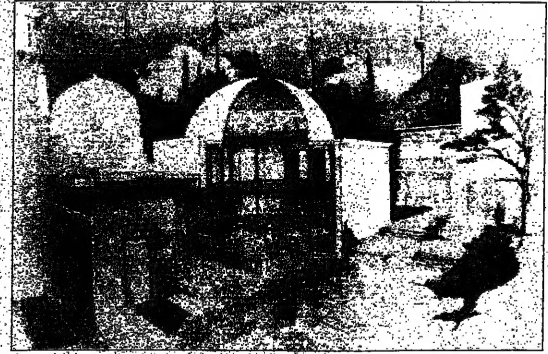


This page, clockwise from left: The Hall of Listening; the Company of Mawlawi Dervishes, founded by the Turkish Ministry of Culture in 1990; a detail of the Dervishes' complex, seen from Al-Suyufiya Street; the decorated ceiling of the Sama'khana; one of the students at the restoration centre; Fanfoni's reconstructed section of the Sama'khana; a 19th-century interpretation of the Mawlawiyya. Opposite page, main picture: The Sama'khana: a view from the balcony of the tikkiya; top left corner: "*Ya Hadrat Mawlana*" — a salute to the sheikh, inscribed above the area where the Mawlawiyya pay obeisance to their leader









in *An Underlying Geometrical Design of the Mawlawi Sama'khana* in Cai… IFAO, 1988). From that time on, the symbolic meanings of the rite were enriched by the life and work of Jalaleddin Al-Rumi, as well as meditation and the study of Islamic philosophy and the early culture of Islam.

The first performances were centred on the themes of death and the awakening to universal judgement "by the sound of the heavenly spheres". The music to which the dervishes danced may therefore have referred to the call to paradise, and the *Sama'* as performed by Al-Rumi at the death of Shamsi Tabriz (the leader of the order) may be related to the *tawaf*, or the seven circumambulations of the Ka'ba or of a saint's tomb. Later interpretations stressed the Sufi cosmological ideology instead, in which the *Dawr-i-Waladi* represents the supreme heavenly movement which encloses the whole, while the four rounds of the *Salam* represent respectively the starry heaven or the soul of the angelic world (*malakut*), the sun or the spirit of the power world, the moon or the secret of the divine world and finally the world of the composed elements.

The Mawlawi dervishes, performing the *Sama'* rite, annihilate illusory existence and, awakening to the music, are gradually absorbed into cosmic harmony. Geometrical shapes, the circle and its centre in particular, which mirror the Unity from which all things emanate, as well as Pythagorean and Platonic esotericism form the basis of the Mawlawis' philosophy, later enriched by contact with cultures absorbed by Islam during its expansion.

The *Sama'* ceremony was two-fold, including the "dance" on one hand and the veneration of mystics' tombs found within the confines of the Sama'khana on the other. "These two aspects can be said to have been interdependent from the moment of the mystic exaltation of Jalaleddin Al-Rumi, who performed the *Sama'* rite at the death of Shamsi Tabriz," explains Fanfoni. The veneration of the deceased, which seems to have been a component of the *Sama'*, then came to acquire a particular cosmic symbolism.

Some initiates, through this symbolic performance, succeeded in drawing the spectators in, allowing them to perceive (*sama'* means to hear or listen) the unitary sense of the laws which regulate the multiple aspects of cosmic harmony.

WHISPERS OF THE PAST: In *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (East-West Publications, London, 1978), E.W. Lane confirms the presence of the Mawlawi Dervishes in Cairo in the 1830s. Attending the birth feast of Al-Hussein, Lane was able to observe the rites of dervishes of "different nations and different orders", who participated in the celebrations.

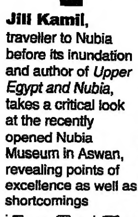
Squeezed into the front row between four women, one of whom apparently had her nose buried in his mustache — where it may have found its way due to the excitement of the moment, or the thickness of the crowds — Lane witnessed the various phases of the *zikr* which the Mawlawiyya were performing: "...another *darweesh*, a Turk, of the order of the Mowlawees, in the middle of the circle, began to whirl, using both his feet to effect the motion, and extending his arms; the motion increased in velocity until his dress spread out like an umbrella. He continued whirling thus for about ten minutes, after which he bowed to his superior, who stood within the great ring, and then, without showing any signs of fatigue or giddiness, joined the *darweeshes* in the great ring, who had now begun to ejaculate the name of God with great vehemence, and to jump to the right instead of stepping. After the whirling, six other *darweeshes*, within the great ring, formed another ring, but a very small one, each placing his arms upon the shoulders of those next to him, and thus disposed, they performed a revolution similar to that of the larger ring, except it being much more rapid, repeating also the same exclamation of *Allah* but with a rapidity proportionally greater. This motion they maintained for about the same length of time that the whirling of the single *darweesh* before had occupied, after which the whole party sat to rest. They rose again after the lapse of about a quarter of an hour, and performed the same exercise a second time."

According to Fanfoni, the settlement of the Cairo *tikiyya* must have had a provisional character at first, as the occupants seem to have contented themselves with assigning new functions to the existing edifices, devoting a temporary space to the Sama'khana. The later phases of building activity around the present Sama'khana, however, can be dated to the first half of the 19th century. Fanfoni believes that it was the last such building to be erected by the order, and probably the last still in existence after Ataturk closed all the order's Turkish complexes in 1925.

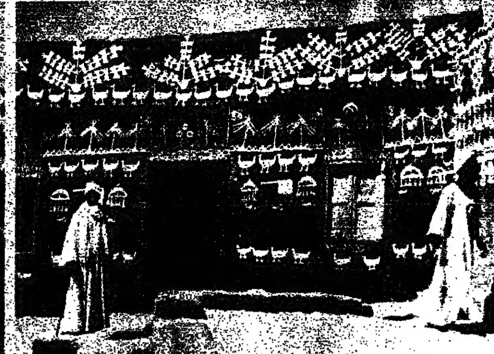
There is some speculation as to the actual date at which the Cairo *tikiyya* was closed, and, while a few historians estimate that this event took place in 1916, Fanfoni quotes an article by Mai Ziyada in *Al-Ahram*, dated 13 June 1928, which refers to the presence of the Mawlawiyya, confirmed by the existence of a recording of their music made at the Congress of Arabic Music of 1932. Finally, the date inscribed over the entrance of the convent refers to its use in 1945 as a guest house by the *Gam'iyya Khayriyya* (Welfare Association).

Too many cooks in the Nubia Museum

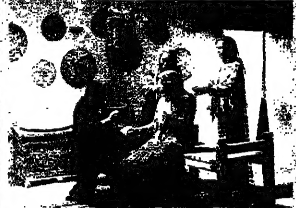
Jill Kamil, traveller to Nubia before its inundation and author of *Upper Egypt and Nubia,* takes a critical look at the recently opened Nubia Museum in Aswan, revealing points of excellence as well as shortcomings













Old Nubia as captured on film by Robert Fernea in the 1960's is no more, but the spirit of Nubia lives on in its people and its heritage

I approached the museum filled with eager anticipation. Having witnessed its growth from conception in the 1960s, through the initial choice of site and commission in 1973, followed by the go-ahead in 1985, I was more than anxious to see the end result. My excitement was all the more heightened by the museum's painful gestation period of no less than 12 years during which there were three changes of location, alterations in design, and disagreement, confusion, delay and procrastination regarding such questions as the approach to the museum, the choice of objects for exhibition and the deadline for completion.

It had been a long wait. Originally slated for completion in two years, in 1987, this was subsequently postponed, first to 1990, then "the spring of 1991", "early 1992," 1993, 1995, and even after the much publicised "grand opening" in November 1997 on the occasion of the anniversary celebrations marking the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb, the deadline could not be met; neither the lighting fixtures nor the objects for display could be rushed through in time.

Well, here I was, on the very threshold at last, and I expected a masterpiece of design and execution: a museum that matched — in excellence if not in size — late Egyptian architect Mahmoud El-Hakim's small Luxor Museum which received worldwide acclaim in 1986. The new museum, unfortunately, fell short of my expectations and, may I add, of world-class standards. This saddens me because there is no excuse for many of the faults which could easily have been remedied.

But first things first. If one of the purposes of the museum was to record the Nubian heritage, thought to be lost forever beneath the waters of Lake Nasser, and stress Nubian identity and pride, then it is unquestionably a resounding success. Buying entrance tickets with me were groups of youngsters on school excursions, village women with younger children, Nubians from all walks of life walking around the spacious and well laid-out garden and touring the museum with profound attention and touching interest. No wonder. All inhabited and developed areas of Nubia were inundated by the backwaters of the High Dam, which was completed in 1971. So, to the bulk of visitors, this is a fairy-tale come to life.

The building is on two floors and a mezzanine and the exhibits have been dissected into volumes and areas that define the different periods. The historical range is from pre-Dynastic times right through to modern. At one end of the scale is an abundance of pre-dynastic material: hand-axes, copper tools, palettes and amulets, cylinder seals and pottery of different Nubian cultures; even a model of a Neolithic corpse buried with grave goods, all displayed in state-of-the-art showcases with accurate labels and appropriate lighting. This is one of the most outstanding sections of the museum. Another is at the other end of the spectrum: the section on ethnography which includes reconstructions of the distinctive domestic architecture of Nubia, revealing country life, clothing, jewellery, and even the Post Boat that once stopped at each of the 46 districts of Nubia en route from Shellal to Wadi Halfa.

As I walked round the museum, I was confronted by a model of the tomb discovered beneath a mound in Qustul, where a magnificent collection of royal crowns, emblems, jewels and silver trappings of horses buried with their owners, was discovered by British archaeologist Walter Emery in 1931. To my delight, I discovered that, after years of wrangling, the decision had finally been taken to transfer the whole collection from Cairo Museum, where it was seldom seen, for display in the Nubia Museum.

Well-chosen objects were brought from other museums as well. From Elephantine Museum came several statues from the Heqaib sanctuary discovered by Labib Habachi in 1945, including the nobleman Senpu with his left hand across his chest in a gesture of politeness and respect in village society, and the granite statue of Senebtifi with a big round belly and large hands.

From the Coptic Museum came 10th century wall paintings salvaged from the Church of Abdallah Nirgi and unique icons from the church at Qasr Ibrim. Remarkable monuments all, even though the museum appears to be too big for the objects on display and the lighting in some areas, or lack thereof, gives more of an impression of a barn than a museum.

I cannot help but recall one of El-Hakim's complaints against UNESCO when it was first approached by the then Egyptian Antiquities Organisation: "How can you design a museum when you don't know what it's going to house; UNESCO demands so many metres for this period, and so many for that even before a decision has been made on the objects that are going to be displayed," he had said.

As for the rest, my admiration was soon tempered by frustration and bafflement. I quickly became conscious of other flaws including historical imbalance and unforgivably poor editing of texts. Historically, the sequence is uneven because despite the dearth of objects from certain periods, I did feel that more attention could have been given to the Dynastic periods as well as the Coptic and Islamic periods which were glossed over when compared, for example, with the section on pre-Dynastic cultures of Nubia. The Islamic period is represented by a couple of tapestries, texts, painfully few objects and a clerical robe which is, in fact, Coptic. With huge placards in Arabic and English to outline Nubian history throughout all its stages, surely it would have been possible to augment the rich and varied saga of continuous culture by means other than the few surviving artifacts of these periods.

And on the question of the beautifully rendered historical placards that are placed at appropriate places throughout the museum, the texts could well have done with some proofreading by a native English speaker. One example: "As a hunter for meat man entirely dependent (sic) on his natural environment. How to eat without himself being eaten was chief problem."

So much care was given to so many aspects of the museum that I wondered at the reasons for the oversights. On the positive side, for example, I spotted a headless statue of Khafre (Chephren) excavated from Giza. I wondered what it was doing in the Nubia Museum until the label reminded me that the mines of Nubia were exploited by Egyptian pharaohs from earliest times and that this statue was made of rare diorite quarried near Toshka. How fitting, I thought, to select this marvelously carved but headless statue (which cannot compare with the famous diorite statue of Khafre in Cairo Museum and which had consequently been relegated to a storeroom) as an example of the natural wealth of Nubia. A pair of sandstone hawks from the quarries of Nakhenut was also noteworthy.

On the negative side, however, my critical faculties quickly came into play because Mahmoud El-Hakim, who was commissioned to draw up plans for the museum, and whom I knew well, had a personal philosophy towards public architecture. One aspect of this was the use of ramps as a transitional element for the flow of traffic. This was brilliantly achieved in his Luxor Museum where his "low impact" interior concept of "gentle flowing space" carries a visitor (up gentle ramps) from individual vistas at strategic positions that encourage an organised, uninterrupted flow of people through the museum and prevent the tendency to double back and congest the space.

This is not achieved in the Nubia Museum. UNESCO, which appointed Mexican architect Pedro Ramirez Vasquez to complete the museum after the death of El-Hakim in 1985, preferred staircases; ramps were kept to a minimum. Apart from the fact that much of the museum is excluded to people in wheelchairs, the flow has had to be artificially checked by the use of thick red ropes in garish brass stands to block off different areas.

I have left my most serious criticism to last, although it concerns the first things a visitor sees: a statue of Ramses II fashioned, not by royal sculptors but by the people of Nubia, and a model of the Nile Valley from the Mediterranean to Wadi Halfa. As I began to descend the first flight of a massive stairway leading from the entrance to the auditorium, I lifted my eyes to behold a graceless pair of truncated legs from foot to waistline. Moving down to the short landing leading to the second flight of stairs, I stopped to take stock of the vista: this time I could see the full-length figure of the pharaoh but minus crown which was cut off by the roof as effectively as Ramses' styrofoam counterpart in the foyer of Ramses Hilton. Only when I reached the bottom of the stairway did I realise that the roof of the museum had been raised at the centre of the atrium to accommodate the crowned pharaoh whose unique statue could properly be seen only from this vantage, and from the mezzanine. As for the huge, eight-metre-long model of the Nile Valley at the foot of the stairway, all the temples are in position but the labels have been placed in such a way that they cannot be easily identified by visitors held back by the ropes. It seems not to have occurred to those involved with the interior design that placing the labels facing east and west would have solved the problem.

I have been privy to the often painful vicissitudes since the conception of the museum and now, in the final analysis, I cannot help but wonder whether there were not too many fingers in the pie. El-Hakim is out of the picture, the EAO is now the SCA (Supreme Council of Antiquities), and the location of the museum was changed three times. Even when El-Hakim was still around to defend his architectural design, he was obliged to supplant his preferred use of the ramp because UNESCO wanted a staircase.

Well, for better or for worse, the stairs are there. And so is a makeshift wooden ramp at the very entrance to the museum that is hastily placed against the new tiled stairs whenever a wheelchair-bound visitor arrives.

Jill Kamil's Upper Egypt and Nubia, *published by Egyptian International Publishing-Longman (EIP-L), is available from Sphinx Bookshop and most major bookstores. LE25.* Nubia: Sketches, Notes and Photographs *by Margo Veillon is available from AUC Bookshop. Hardbound. LE150.*

ZEIN

Pepi in copper

The Pepi I statue, now on display at the Egyptian Museum after a year of restoration, is drawing more than passing attention, reports **Nevine El-Aref**

Last week, the Egyptian Museum celebrated a special occasion: the end of a year-long restoration project of the copper statue Pepi I, the smaller of two statues, launched a year ago by the Supreme Council of Antiquities in collaboration with the Roman-Germanic Museum in Mainz, Germany.

Mohamed Saleh, general director of the museum, said that work on the other life-size statue began three months ago and is expected to continue for at least a year.

Saleh explained that the restoration of the Pepi statue — now on display — had gone through several stages before museum officials and restorers agreed on a final formula. At first they suggested the use of chemicals to remove rust caused by the corrosion of metal. The second proposal was to use electric power to reconstruct the copper from the rust and corrosion. "But this was regarded as unsafe for the statue itself," said Saleh. The restoration technique finally used was simple manual labour to remove the thick agglomeration of oxide that had completely eroded the metal.

"No chemicals were used. Some ultrasound was necessary and then all the work was executed by hand, using such tools as a dentist's drill to remove the encrustations and then clean, square centimetre by square centimetre," Saleh explained.

Pepi was made by hammering metal over a wooden core attached by copper nails. The kilt and headdress were made separately, probably of plaster, and were gilded. The eyes were inlaid.

"It is the oldest copper statue ever found in Egypt," said Gaballa Ali Gaballa, general secretary of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). He added that it is 70 centimetres long and was found in 1868 in Hierakonopolis, near Edfu north of Aswan. It was then kept in the Egyptian Museum. "No attention had been given the statue since that time," Gaballa said, adding that "It represents one of the most famous young pharaohs of the sixth dynasty."

Pepi's restoration was sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Interior and the Ministry for Education and Science of the German State of Rhineland-Palatinate.

Far removed from Ancient Egyptian antiquities, but also celebrated on the same day, was the inauguration of the 14th century *sabil* (public water supply pump) of Sultan Al-Nasir Mohamed Ibn-Qalawun in the Gamaliya district of medieval Cairo. "This is one of the oldest *sabils* in Fatimid Cairo and was part of a grand plan to restore the Gamaliya," said Gaballa.

May El-Ibrashy, architect restorer of the monument, said that "after a detailed study we decided not to reconstruct it because the gypsum drum was of a later date than the wooden frame and dome of the *sabil* and the only record of the original appearance of the dome was in one of Ebers' engravings and so not sufficiently detailed to help with reconstruction." El-Ibrashy said it could not even be ascertained that the drum as it looks today corresponds to the original. "Only one original panel was found intact; the three others were affixed on the remains of an octagonal timber structure still standing at the time."

The medieval monument is one of 11 already restored by the German Institute of Archaeology.

"These two historic masterpieces, Pepi and the *sabil*, represent two very important and different stages of Egypt's past: the Pharaonic and the Islamic eras," said Wolf-Dietrich Schilling, the German ambassador to Egypt. He said the German side is proud to be Egypt's partner in continuing efforts towards maintaining and restoring its monuments.

Mid-year holiday packages

With the approach of the mid-year holidays, hotels in Cairo, the Red Sea, Sinai, Luxor and Aswan are offering special prices for Egyptians and foreign residents. Here are some of the attractive deals:

Sharm El-Sheikh
Fayrouz and Residence Hilton hotels offer double rooms for LE110 including half board and taxes. Valid until the end of April.
Pyramisa offers double rooms for LE145 per person including buffet breakfast. The offer is valid until the end of April.

Aswan
Pyramisa hotel offers double rooms for LE125 per person including buffet breakfast. Valid until the end of April.

Luxor
Sheraton offers double rooms for LE80 per person including buffet breakfast.
Pyramisa Isis offers double rooms for LE95 per person including buffet breakfast. Valid until the end of April.

Red Sea
Hilton Hurghada Resort and **Hilton Plaza** offer double rooms for LE110 per person including half board accommodation inclusive of taxes and service charge. Valid until the end of April.
Intercontinental hotel offers double rooms for LE151 per person inclusive of buffet breakfast and dinner inclusive of service charge and taxes. Single rooms are for LE250, while triple are for LE360. Valid between 2 and 15 February and subject to availability.
Windsor Zafarana offers rooms for LE135 per person on half board basis including service charge and taxes. The offer is valid till 6 March.

Ismailia
Hotel Mercure offers double rooms for LE125 per person including service charge and buffet breakfast and dinner.

Alexandria
Sofitel Cecil offers double rooms for LE90 per person including buffet breakfast, service and taxes.

Cairo
Pyramids Park Intercontinental global partner offers single and double rooms for LE140 including service charge and taxes.
Jolie Ville Mövenpick offers double rooms for LE99 per person including buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes.
Pyramisa offers double rooms for LE110 per person including buffet breakfast. Valid until the end of April.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**

هكذا من الأصل





photos: Mohamed Wassim

It wasn't an easy battle for the Egyptian side until they managed to win the tournament deservedly

First step up the mountain

The Egyptian Olympic under-21 team conquered all in the Arab International friendly tournament to win a place in the African qualifying rounds for Sydney 2000. **Abeer Anwar** had stars in her eyes

Although the Egyptian Olympic team only got together two weeks before the tournament in a closed camp at the Olympic Centre at Maadi, they were nevertheless able to win the Arab International friendly tournament. This success means they are admitted to the African qualifying rounds that may eventually be their gateway to the Sydney Olympics in the year 2000. There were four teams participating in the event — Oman, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt — which was held at Tersana Club from 22 to 26 January.

Helmi Tolaan, technical manager of the Olympic team, was very anxious before the tournament began, since the players had not competed at this level as a team for ten months. "What adds to my fear is that I do not know anything about the other competing teams. I have not seen the way they play before," he added. Lebanon's technical manager, Mahmoud Saad, however, is an Egyptian who used to train Zamalek seniors, and so is thoroughly acquainted with Egyptian teams, their tactics and their strengths and weaknesses.

In their opening match, attended by Dr Abdel-Moneim Emara, executive manager of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, Egypt were able to beat Lebanon 1-0. It was a difficult match for both teams, because it was the first time they had met. During the first half of the match, there was a distinct absence not only of goals, but of anything resembling a serious threat from either side. But in the second half, the pace shifted up a gear. The Lebanese players started to take control, but it was Egypt's Abdel-Latif El-Domany who was able to steal the match for his team, scoring the only goal of the match in the 4th minute.

One of the teams that Tolaan had been most in fear of was Oman. "They are a strong team, and they took part in the U-17 World Cup where they attracted a lot of attention by giving an excellent performance as an Arab team," he said. But all Tolaan's fears proved unfounded on the day, when the young pharaohs beat Oman comfortably 3-0 in their second match. Again, there was no score in the first half, as each team tried to probe and study the tactics of their opponent. However, in the second half, the Egyptians seemed to have been seized by goal mania, as they tucked away three of them to finish the match victorious. Two of the goals fell to their striker, Mohamed Farouq, in the 9th and 22nd minutes, while the third was scored by Abdel-Latif El-Domani.

Syria, having beaten Oman 3-2 and drawn with Lebanon 0-0, found themselves facing Egypt in the final match. It was a well-balanced game with both teams performing well. But despite this, Egypt managed to snatch first place and the gold medal in another 3-0 victory. As was becoming usual, not a goal was scored in the first half of the match, as both teams seemed to be warming up. In the second half, the Egyptians were again carried away on a wave of enthusiasm, with this time the goals coming from Walid Elwani and Mohamed and Abdallah Ragab. As a result, Egypt finished first with a total of 9 points, Syria second with 5, Oman third with 3 and Lebanon fourth with 1. In the third and fourth place play-offs, Oman sprang a surprise by beating Lebanon 4-0, thus winning their first match of the tournament. Their late awakening took Lebanon by surprise and earned Oman the bronze medal. Egypt's Sayed Abdel-Hafez was also named best player of the tournament.

All Thaied up

Amidst great scepticism that Egypt will do any good at all in the African Nations Cup in February in Burkina Faso, coach Mahmoud El-Gohary has pinned all his hopes on a last-minute revival in Thailand

It was a long story of chaos, contradiction and conflict, sighs **Eman Abdel-Moeti**. After a series of defeats in the qualifying rounds, by some miracle Egypt still managed to make it to the finals of the African Nations Cup next month in Burkina Faso. Their current coach, Mahmoud El-Gohary, was recruited early last year precisely in order to save the team from failure in this competition. Though his efforts might appear to many to have been in vain, Egypt's success or failure has become a matter of honour for him. Many believe he will sink with the ship, and are forecasting disaster in Ouagadougou. Egypt has been placed in one of the toughest pools, where they will meet Morocco, the tournament's number one favourites, as well as Zambia and Mozambique, who are both strong teams.

Since we were defeated by the Moroccans over the two legs of our qualifying match, we will probably lose to them again, and indeed they seem almost certain to come first in our pool. The Moroccan team is made up almost entirely of professional players with European clubs, who gather together only on rare occasions, when their favourite activity is listening to the Moroccan national anthem before taking delivery of substantial chunks of silverware.

The Zambians may not have the same rigid belief in such obscure social rites as the Moroccans, but they are a strong side none the less. They were the team that forced Egypt to call the travel agents and confirm their return dates at the last African Nations Cup. The Zambians have a disproportionate number of brothers in their squad, all of whom seem to have inherited the secret of football success. Not only is their physical fitness exceptional, but they are experts at using the 4-4-2 formation to take control of the entire pitch.

Although El-Gohary is taking Mozambique lightly, we should not underestimate them. Teams underestimated in the past by Egypt include Liberia, Burundi, and even Sudan, all of whom subsequently proved themselves quite capable of planting a sufficient number of shots in our net to win the matches they played against us. The Mozambique squad, like Morocco's, is made up almost entirely of European club players, with only two exceptions. They have been preparing very seriously and are determined to give a good account of themselves, as they did in recent friendly matches against Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Botswana, Namibia, and Burkina Faso.

Egypt, however, not to be outwitted, will be preparing for a gruelling battle in Africa by taking part in a friendly tournament against Asian and European teams in Bangkok!

El-Gohary says the Thai experience will help overcome all the team's weak points, and get them into shape before they travel south. The team already has many injuries and some of its best players have multiple on-going injuries, such as Medhat Abdel-Hadi, and Ali Maher, who is still undergoing treatment even now in Bangkok. The first thing El-Gohary needs to work on is enhancing the players' physical fitness, before tackling their technical errors. "Then there has to be a balance between attacking and defensive tactics," he said. After all, you can't have a team that's all David Batty and no Alan Shearer.

Only time will tell whether the Thai trip was a good idea. Although El-Gohary sees it above all as a way of keeping the team in high spirits, he usually looks as though he could do with some cheering up himself. But it's difficult to generate confidence, when no one has a clue where the team now stands in relation to the other African teams we will be playing in February.

El-Gohary admits that Morocco will not only be our toughest rival, but that past experience suggests we will prove once again unable to rise to the challenge. He has also conceded that we have to respect Zambia's development, which puts them among the strongest African teams today. But do these two facts taken together mean we will have to settle for third place in our pool? Watch this space...

In the qualifying rounds, Egypt were defeated by, then drew with Morocco, beat then drew with Senegal, and beat then drew with Ethiopia. Had Morocco not won its second leg match against Senegal, we would never have made it to the finals.

Playing to win by the skin of the teeth as we usually do in major events will not work anymore. What we only just got away with in the qualifiers may be what condemns us without appeal in the finals. We're going to Burkina Faso, though the Lord knows how. What can we do when we get there? That's a good question, Tonto.

Up and coming

It doesn't seem likely there'll be an all-Egyptian final at this year's Juniors World Squash Cup, as there was in the last two events. But Eman Abdel-Moeti isn't worried: she has her sights set firmly on the future

Ahmed Barada won the individual event at the Juniors World Squash Cup in '94, and Ahmed Faizy ran off with the same prize in '96. Although this year we may not have ourselves a world junior champion, our team may still make it into the top four in the tournament, that will be held in the US in August. On top of that, Egypt may well have another world junior champion in the making who will be ready in time for the World Cup 2000.

The British Junior Open, which is held every year in January, is usually the event which determines who will dominate the next World Cup. This year's World Cup number one favourite in the individual event is Malaysia's Ong Beng Hee, who made an entirely appropriate winner at the British event that has just finished.

As for our juniors, there is a paradox. Although they did not manage to reach the quarter-finals in the UK, they are well-placed to go as far as the semi-finals of the World Cup. As Hossam Nasser, head of the Egyptian Squash Association, explains, "Our juniors were defeated by players who will be over 19 by the time the World Cup comes round." Egypt's Mohamed Ismail, Wael Hatem, Mohamed Abbas, and Karim Darwish were defeated by Ong Beng Hee, John Russel of England, Tommy Brown of Holland, and Oly Timothy of Finland, respectively. None of those players — with the exception of Hee — will be eligible to play in the World Cup.

Commenting on this situation, Ashraf Hanafi, the national junior team coach, said, "Amr Shabana and Ahmed Faizy were supposed to play in the British Open, but they withdrew. They informed the World Squash Association of their withdrawal well in advance, but for reasons that remain obscure, the draw did not change as it normally would have done to take this into account. As a result, our juniors found themselves playing against very tough contenders who, like Shabana and Faizy, will be over 19 by the time August comes." That is why there is still hope that, as a team, our juniors can win a place in the top four in the world. Despite the upset in England, the World Cup will see a more conventional battle for the top rankings, pitting England, Pakistan, Australia, and Egypt against one another.

On the individual level, Hanafi said, "I can't promise anything, because there will be very good players from several countries. For instance, Hee from Malaysia is the number one favourite, while Mansur Kamar El-Zaman (son of the former top world player Kamar El-Zaman) from Pakistan is number two, and Nick Mathew and Adrian Grant from England are numbers three and four respectively. "If we are lucky in the main draw and our players do not face any of those four in the first two rounds, we may well reach the quarter-finals in the individual event," said Hanafi. But Hossam Nasser is less cautious: he believes that Wael Hatem, Mohamed Abbas and Mohamed Ismail are all capable of reaching the semi-finals if they really give their best on the day.

Alongside the under-19 team, younger members of the national team will be competing in the individual event in preparation for their debut as the national team at the 2000 World Cup. Officials of the Egyptian Squash Association have great hopes for some of these younger players, especially Yasser El-Halabi who won the U-14 category in the British Open this year at the age of 13. El-Halabi had been placed second in the same category last year. Many people already see him as a future junior world champion in 2000 and 2002. "Yasser El-Halabi, Mahmoud Abdel-Kader and Hassan El-Ki'i are promising young squash players who can maintain Egypt's dominance in the world of squash," said Hanafi.

In order to be sure Egypt does not run out of champions at some point in the future, great attention is being given to all the members of the junior national team, whose ages range from 13 to 18. In preparation for the 1998 and 2000 World Cups, Hanafi has dedicated this whole year to perfecting the juniors' skills through camps and competitions: "The team will be taking part in the German Open and the Netherlands Open for juniors, and the Egyptian Association will organise for the first time ever an International Juniors Championship in June, as the last competition the juniors go through before the World Cup." He added that the team will also participate in certain senior competitions, such as the Swiss Open and the Austrian Open in March, and the Al-Ahram Tournament in June. There will be camps for them in Pakistan and England. Coach Hanafi has also managed to arrange for top world senior players, like Simon Parke and Chris Walker, to come to Egypt for friendly matches with our players.



***Al-Ahram Al-Masa'i* won Al-Ahram's five-a-side football tournament and received the Ibrahim Nafie Cup. Best striker Amr Makhlouf receives the winning team's cup from Ali Ghoneim, deputy chairman of Al-Ahram, Mohamed Basha (from r-l) deputy chief editor of *Al-Ahram*, Hassan Hamdi, head of advertising, and Kamal Darwish, the tournament's host**
(photo: Sami Bushra)

Victory for the Eagles

Ramadan is over, and so are the tournaments. The most prestigious of them all, the Horus, managed to attract an overwhelming 5,000 spectators to its final session. **Dalia El-Hennawy** was one of them

Defending champions the Eagles walked off with the Horus Trophy, collecting LE40,000 prize money for the first place, after beating Shooting Club 3-1 in the final. The team included former national team star Taher Abu Zeid, Hamada Sedki, Khaled Esmat, Mohamed El-Sayed, Yasser Abdel-Khalak, as well as the Mubarak brothers; Alaa and Gamal, who are always keen to participate in this annual tournament.

In second place were Shooting Club, whose reward was LE20,000. Their team surprised everyone by reaching the finals with players such as Mohamed Saad, Tarek Hassan, Mostapha Abu-Dahab, Emad Salah, and Hazem El- Hawary. The Nefertity team came third, followed by the Army in fourth place. All those who finished in between third and eighth places took home prize money of LE10,000 each.

"This has been the most successful tournament ever, both in terms of the organisation and of the huge participation of great football stars," commented Abdel-Moneim Emara, head of the executive board of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports. "There also seems to be a great future for five-a-side football being more widely played here in Egypt. I also think that the National five-a-side team will reap the benefit when they come to decide who will represent Egypt next time," added Emara.

The tournament witnessed a number of surprises. Zamalek failed to reach the finals, even though their team included such former champions as Hisham Yakan, Ahmed Abdel-Halim, Walid Hamed and Abdel-Rehim Mohamed. Another surprise was that Wadi El-Nil, though they had easily the most powerful attack and the most powerful defence, could not make it to the finals either.

"Media-wise, the tournament has flourished in the eyes of the public. It was one of the best tournaments this year, thanks to the great number of former stars competing," said Ahmed Afiffy, member of the board of directors of the Horus Club.

Mohamed El-Sayed of the Eagles Club was selected as the best player, Osama Farag of Ismaili as the best goal-keeper, and Egypt-Air won the team award for good footballing manners.

The past is the past

ALL WORLD athletic records should be annulled at the start of the year 2000, allowing track and field to make a new start after the drugs era, according to Helmut Digel, president of the German Athletics Federation. Digel, who is also vice-president of the German Olympic Committee and a member of the IAAF council, made his suggestion in an interview with radio station Deutschlandfunk. He said that after the millenium, the old records could be regarded as "records of the century".

Triple record

ETHIOPIAN 10,000-metres Olympic champion Haile Gebrselassie broke his own 3,000-metres world indoor record last week with a time of 7 minutes 26.14 seconds. The 24-year-old Gebrselassie then vowed he would reclaim his 5,000 and 10,000-metres outdoor records. The triple 10,000-metres outdoor world champion, who beat runner-up Spaniard Alberto Garcia by over 15 seconds, set the previous record of 7:30.72 in Stuttgart in 1996.

Tiger roars

TIGER Woods pulled off one of the greatest comebacks ever seen in world golf last week to win the US$368,000 Johnnie Walker Classic after a nailbiting play-off. The 22-year-old American closed an overnight gap of eight shots on leader and defending champion Ernie Els of South Africa, and then beat the world number three at the second extra hole. Woods shot a final round seven-under-par 65, one off the course record held by Greg Norman, to go to nine under 279 for the tournament. He had to wait more than 90 minutes to see if Els would hold on to his lead.

Ice victory

THOMAS Stangassinger chalked up a record 19th win of the season for the Austrian men's team by winning the World Cup Ski Slalom last week. Stangassinger had a time of one minute 44.27 seconds. His compatriot Thomas Sykora was second in 1:44.35, with Norway's Ole Christian Furuseth third in 1:44.42. Meanwhile, Germany's Martina Ertl won the women's World Cup Giant Slalom in a combined time of two minutes 37.45 seconds. She finished ahead of teammate Katja Seizinger (2:39.00) and Sophie Lefrance-Duvillard of France (2:39.47). It was Ertl's second giant slalom victory in a row.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

Al-Ahram Weekly

Saad El-Safarti:

The whistler and the dervishes

Ramadan entertainment was not always monopolised by soap operas and *fawazir*. Long ago, popular arts — the extemporaneous variety, not that offered by state institutions — were popular in every sense of the word. The real thing can still be found — if you look hard enough











Main picture: Saad El-Safarti, fez firmly in place. From left to right: the "family corner"; one of the dervishes of Al-Hussein; a singer from El-Safarti's troupe; the all-male ensemble, complete with whistler and sagat player, gathers for a resounding finale

On the narrow road which runs behind Al-Hussein Mosque, young men in brown and green jackets stand in front of a small door, beckoning prospective customers. A drab brown sign to the right of the door tells us that this is the Darawish Café starring *Negoum Al-Hussein* — the Stars of Al-Hussein — headed by Saad El-Safarti himself. It is neither the waiters nor the sign that *draw people into the Darawish Café*, however, but the strands of music which make their way out on the street.

Past the door, one is immediately drawn to the far left corner of the small, windowless coffeeshop. On an elevated stage, three whistlers, a violinist, drummer, player of *sagat* (small, castañet-type cymbals), and singer capture everyone's attention. A closer look at the interior of the Darawish Café reveals a drab room. Light brown tiles cover the walls, a few light bulbs hang from the ceiling, and three ceiling fans make slow rotations above us. On one wall, high up behind where the troupe is performing, a picture of Youssef Chahine with Said Mohamed Youssef, the owner, hangs within a thin golden frame.

Said is a short man in trousers and pullover. Big gold rings adorn his hands. He is used to reporters and, as soon as he spots us, he agilely moves through the crowd to tell us all. "The coffeeshop was started by my father, when this area was still residential," he explains, "this area is full of *darawish* — dervishes — people who have gone crazy with the love of God. That is where we get our name." The shop was not always on a narrow road; Said can remember a time when it overlooked a square instead. "During Nasser's time there was an expansion of the mosque," he says pointing to the back façade and fence of the mosque only a few feet away. Then he perches on a table and lets us enjoy the show.

Everything at the Darawish Café seems to revolve around the stage, even the seating arrangements. All the chairs are in rows, with little tables and water pipes squeezed in between. One corner is for women — or, as Said puts it, for "families". Some of the women in this corner do not look very family-oriented, though. Two towards the back are in black *galabiyas*, gold all the way up to their elbows, and heavy kohl rimming their eyes. Both are pulling contentedly on their waterpipes. One of them smiles at me, revealing a conspicuous gold tooth. A few others are much younger, in tight jeans, heavy make-up and costume jewellery. One of them moves towards Said in distress: "They are taking our pictures," she exclaims, and he pats her on the shoulder, moving her over to the side.

But enough of the audience and back to the troupe. Sitting on a chair in an obvious position of authority is an old man in a fez. The musicians *look towards him* as he plays on a short brown whistle. He also has seen us coming in and soon motions to another member of the troupe to take care of things as he steps down and makes his way toward us. Outside Al-Darawish, in a neighbouring coffeeshop, where it is quieter and we can talk, Saad Azab tells his story.

Born in 1928 to a family of farmers in Sharqiya, Saad was the only son. His family expressed their gratitude for having finally been endowed with a male heir by holding a party every year, on the night of the prophet's birthday. At the centre of festivities was Mohamed Sanhouti, a prominent whistler at the time. This was the beginning of a life-long love affair between Saad and the whistle. He pulls the wooden whistle, about 12 centimetres long, out of his pocket and cradles it in his palm with care. Both ends are rimmed in copper filigree. "The whistle has many names, the original name is the *sibs* and it is the grandfather of the *nay*," he explains, adding, "it is the most beautiful instrument, a work of God, all it takes is a breath through it to have music."

It is for this beautiful instrument that Saad ran away from home at the age of 13, to attend the *zikr* circles at the *moulid* of Al-Hussein. "My father had broken my whistle many times and beat me. He would demand, 'Do you want to become a European beggar with that thing?' So when people from my village, including the *omda*, said they were going to the *moulid*, I ran away from home to join them in Cairo."

During the *moulid* he was "discovered" by *Hagg* Mehanna, the sheikh of a Sufi order. "He took me to a *zar* at a pasha's house and when I went home the people gave me tips which came up to LE7. I was so happy because at that time the principal of a school made that much money."

By the end of the *moulid*, Saad had made up his mind to become a *safarti* — a whistler — and stay on in Cairo. He hid in the bathroom of the mosque until the people from his village had left and went to live at *Hagg* Mehanna's. "In four months, I had made LE130 and it was the time for the sighting of the crescent of Ramadan, so I decided to go home and bought mixed nuts to take my family," he remembers. On his return, he handed LE100 — "in one piece" — to his father, who immediately accused him of theft. To prove his innocence, the whistler took his father back to Cairo that very night, reaching *Hagg* Mehanna's house at 3am. The incident consolidated his position, and he finally received approval to stay on in Cairo.

His connection to the Darawish was established later. In 1944, he decided to establish his own popular arts troupe. "Said's father was a great friend of mine, and the coffeeshop became my headquarters," he remembers.

Until then his work was mainly connected to the *zar*, and he made use of *Hagg* Mehanna's connections. In the late '40s, he had a change of heart. "I realised that the main woman responsible for the *zar*, the *kodia*, was a liar and that the people we were doing this for were feudalists and pashas," he points out.

His criticism of the practice was to result in his participation in the then controversial motion picture *Al-Mabrouk* (The Blessed). "I met [Mahmoud] El-Meligui, and [Mahmoud] Ismail here in Al-Hussein because Ismail was an Ahmedi [an adherent of the Ahmediya order]. I knew all the details and so I was responsible for the music and the procession. But I only showed up one time next to Mariam Fakhreddin," Saad says.

Upon its release in 1957, the movie aroused the wrath of the Sufi sects. "They sent me many letters, full of profanities." That was not the end of it. The then sheikh of all the Sufi orders brought legal action against the film, which was actually banned for several months before a court ruling in its favour. "I had to go to the Revolutionary Court, which was presided over by Sadat at the time, with El-Meligui. I walked into the court in a fancy *galabiya* and a coat; the material cost 15 piastres per metre," he recounts proudly, cocking his fez over one eye.

His clothes are a matter of great pride to him, and he still wears the fez despite his adoration of Nasser. "To me, there is God in the heavens and Nasser on earth, preceded only by the whistle, followed only by Um Kalthoum." A silver medallion on which Um Kalthoum's picture is engraved hangs from his whistle.

The whistler has many memories: he performed the *zikr* at Farida and Farouk's marriage, for instance; but he also remembers a time when popular arts were the main form of entertainment on all holy occasions.

"Years ago there was Abu Diraa, the famous singer who held his hand up to his ear when singing, and Khadra Mohamed Khedr. Rich people would come to Al-Hussein in Ramadan and commission a banquet for the poor people of the area. They would also commission tents and hold a *zikr* and hire singers," he remembers. "Today everything is commercial."

According to El-Safarti, the downfall of real popular entertainment followed Nasser's death. It ended, specifically, on the 40th day after his death. "Suddenly, we were all required to have permits which the government was only willing to give in far-away places. Hence Abu Diraa and Khadra are no longer a part of Ramadan festivities at Al-Hussein." El-Safarti was able to overcome the obstacle because of his connection to the Darawish. "Because we had a headquarters we could get permits," he explains. His connection to television — he appeared in 1961, on a show hosted by Shawqi Gomaa and Rushdi Saleh — gave him the pretext that he needed to perform in order to practice for TV.

"What has happened to the popular arts is really a shame. Instead of training people on the *rababa* we give them an electric organ. A long time ago you could find hundreds of whistlers; today there are only a few, and the masters have all died." Today, a whistler makes LE50 as opposed to the 25PT Saad made during his youth. The tips are no longer as good, however, and work is not as abundant.

We go back to Al-Darawish and El-Safarti returns to the stage. The pudgy singer immediately turns to him. The man with the cymbals stands up and lifts his hands high above his head, undulating to the rhythm of the music. For the love of *Ahl Al-Beit* — the "People of the Prophet's house" — El-Safarti performs every Saturday at the Mosque of Zein Al-Abedin. During Ramadan and the feast, he collects money from Said for himself and those with him. Keeping up old traditions inherited from as far back as the Fatimids is not an easy task, but El-Safarti and the Darawish do their best.

Profile by **Fatemah Farag**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostries

♥ *Iftars*, *iftars* and nothing but *iftars*, with a few *suhurs* thrown in for good measure: this is what I have been doing, dears, since I talked to you last. One meets such nice people, and the food is so scrumptious, that I wish we could keep the tradition going all year round. Not the fasting of course, just the meals that end it!
William Cavness, the US embassy's public affairs officer, did his bit *iftar*-wise by inviting a throng of Egypt's media people to such an occasion at his beautiful home in Dokki. **William's** lovely wife **Cary** was busy all evening making sure that her guests had the best culinary experience of their lives. But food, of course, was not the only pleasure on offer, as **Dan Kurtzer**, the new US ambassador to Cairo, would tell you himself if you asked him. He had the opportunity to meet some of Egypt's most brilliant writers, including the chairman of Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies **Abdel-Moneim Said**, writers **Lutfi El-Kholi**, **Salah Montasser**, **Said Sonbol** and **Magdi Hussein**, to name just a few members of Cairo's intelligentsia. Among the guests, I spotted young **Nihal Saad** and **Ayman Salah** from Nile TV, munching on *kunafa* and probably discussing their next scoop, while *Al-Ahram Weekly*'s **Nevine Khalil** was observed happily mingling with the crowd. To wrap up the evening, Ambassador **Kurtzer** gave a light-hearted speech to his audience, as a particularly annoying mobile phone rang shrilly. Honestly, dearies, I think a law should be passed prohibiting these gadgets at such cosy gatherings.

♣ No sooner had I recovered from overindulging at my previous *iftar* than my presence was required to grace another, at the Automobile Club, this one organised by our very own renowned columnist **Salama Ahmed Salama** who, on this particular occasion, was hosting the event in his capacity as head of the Society of Writers on Environment and Development (SWED). Minister for the Environment **Nadia Makram Ebeid**, who was guest of honour, was horrified by the sight of some of the club members, at other tables of course, lighting their post-*iftar* cigars and cigarettes. **Ebeid** intends to launch a strict anti-smoking campaign very soon, to the greatest approval, it seems, of **Ibrahim Abdel-Gelil**, executive director of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency, and **Salama Ahmed Salama** — both of whom, needless to say, appeared to be non-smokers on this particular occasion.





(l-r) Mohamed Abdellah's travels; "Water Realm"; Abu Shadi El-Rubi

♠ Another memorable event in the *iftar* department was the very lavish one offered by Al-Salam Hospital of Mohandessin, in line with their Ramadan tradition. This year, the floating restaurant Le Pasha was selected for the venue, and quite a wise choice this was in view of the culinary delights presented to the guests. On a more *spiritual* track, renowned surgeon and chairman of Al-Salam Hospital Dr **Fathi Iskander** paid glowing tribute to the memory of the late Professor **Abu Shadi El-Rubi**, who is sorely missed by all his friends. The *iftar* was attended by the greatest and the best in the medical profession, of course, and by a number of public figures and celebrities.

♦ All these celebrations, dears, could have deterred a less resolute soul than mine from intellectual endeavours, but yours truly is not easily led astray, not even by the best *Umm* Ali in town, and every evening, after a few fast-acting digestive pills, my mind as sharp as ever, I submerge myself staunchly in the *Special Report* or *Rise and Fall of a President*, seeking food for thought. Recently, however, the works of **Mohamed Abdellah**, assistant editor at *Al-Ahram*, caught my full attention, and it is with great interest that I followed the author's international wanderings, detailed in his latest book, *The Travels of Ibn Abdellah*. Also highly recommended is a slim but very uplifting book of verse, *Malakut Al-Ma'* (Water Realm), by **Mo'min Ahmed**, to be kept and cherished for whenever you find yourself in a poetic mood.